1974

Moliere's Concept of Language: a Critical Interpretation.

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MOLIERE'S CONCEPT OF LANGUAGE: A CRITICAL INTERPRETATION

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Foreign Languages

by
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M.A., Louisiana State University, 1967
May, 1974

EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

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Major Field: French

Title of Thesis: Molière's Concept of Language: A Critical Interpretation

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author wishes to express his sincerest appreciation and gratitude to his major professor, Doctor Selma A. Zebouni, whose inspiration, assistance and patience were invaluable in the preparation of this dissertation. Special thanks are also due to Doctor Robert E. Chumbley for his suggestions and encouragement.

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ABSTRACT

Molière's concept of language is studied primarily in reference to the epistomological categories defined by Michel Foucault. These are: 'ressemblance', in which language functions as sign, and which ends at the beginning of the seventeenth century; 'représentation', in which language functions as action, and which is proper to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; and 'signification', in which language functions as meaning, and which belongs to the modern period.

In his earliest farces, Molière's concept of language conforms to the category of 'ressemblance'. He gradually frees himself from this concept until, in Les Fâcheux, he arrives at that of language as 'représentation'. At this point, he is in general conformity to the dramatic and epistomological currents of his day.

Once he has mastered representative language, Molière soon realizes that its weakness lies in its ambiguity. This is first brought out in the quarrel of L'Ecole des Femmes and is admitted by Molière in the preface to the definitive Tartuffe. He continues to dramatize the ambiguity of repre-

sentative language with two important results: he applies it to myth, thereby destroying the validity of myth. Next, he applies ambiguity to representative language itself; this destroys its validity as representation. In Les Fourberies de Scapin, the invalidity of representative language is dramatized.

Although language is colored by ambiguity, it still achieves some sort of communication: it must therefore possess some meaning beyond its verbal manifestation. This leads to the emphasis on language as 'signification' in Les Femmes savantes and Le Malade imaginaire. In the latter play, Molière combines the salient aspects of 'ressemblance', 'représentation', and 'signification' to create a play unique to his time and indicative of the potential of the comic theatre as well as of language.

By evolving from a position of 'ressemblance' through one of 'représentation' to 'signification', Molière precedes, then coincides with, then surpasses the intellectual and esthetic currents of his time. He thus projects his theatre into a realm of meaning that will remain latent until two centuries have passed.

CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM OF LANGUAGE

When one thinks of seventeenth-century France's concern with language, one normally considers linguistic reforms and the foundation of the modern French language. Malherbe's treatment of poetry and language, Richelieu's establishment of the Académie Française, Guez de Balzac's prose, the various dictionaries and grammars produced during the century: generally speaking, the historical import of these events is interpreted in their relationship to the stabilizing and codifying of the French language. We are accustomed to seeing these reforms as important causes behind the greatest literary manifestations of the age, such as Racine's verse or Mme de Lafayette's prose.

At the same time, however, seventeenth-century France provides the background for modern linguistic science and modern philosophies of language.[1] It is Descartes who first re-defines language; for him, it is the mark of humanity and a powerful creative force. In giving it this value, he removes another value attributed to it by previous ages. He sepa-

rates it from 'truth'; what is true, according to Descartes, is that which is perceived as clearly and distinctly so. Language is 'truth' insofar as it manifests the 'trueness' of a human being; apart from this function, it is subordinate to the truth of perception. Previous ages had conceived of language as a sign of the truth of its content; with Descartes, language becomes an arbitrary appendage to its content.

With the Grammaire de Port Royal, the possibilities of Cartesian linguistics are realized further: the word is divided into two elements, 'signifiant' and 'signifié'. A word is an indicator of something else and of itself; it can be analyzed and studied under either aspect. This binary division of language is the basis for much of modern linguistic science as well as for many modern philosophies of language.

The eighteenth-century seems more concerned with disproving certain aspects of Cartesian linguistics than with developing a science of language; mechanists such as La Mettrie attempted to show that the creative aspect of language could be explained by mechanistic means, so that man would lose his mark of distinction and become l'Homme machine, as other animals were 'machines' in Des-

carte's physiology.

It is in the nineteenth century that Romance Philology develops; language is studied as a historical and, later, as an evolutionary phenomenon. The Neo-grammarians, influenced by mechanism as well as by evolution, attempt to set forth 'laws' of phonetic change that, once completely understood, would explain all changes in any given language. With Saussure, there is a delineation of two directions in language study: diachronic linguistics, or the study of a given language as it develops in time, and synchronic linguistics, or the study of a given language at a given time. Saussure also expands the binary aspect of language into 'langue' and 'parole'; 'langue' being the system of a language as presented in its grammar, with 'parole' as the oral, changing, creative language. In our day, 'langue' and 'parole' have evolved, with Chomsky, into 'competence' and 'performance'. The competence of any language is the infinite possibility inherent in that language; its performance is in the finite manifestations of individual speakers. The infinite 'competence' generates finite 'performance', hence the appellation 'generative grammar' for Chomsky's work. There is, according to Chomsky, a rational basis for all languages, a rational perspective on exis-

tence that differs only in the manifestations of different languages.

A divergent view of language is found in the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. According to this hypothesis, different languages reflect different concepts of existence and can even structure the speaker's perspective on experience. Time, space, and other concepts are expressed differently in different grammars (possibly even in different dialects and idiolects of the same language). According to Whorf, each language possesses its own system of logic which, if isolated from the language, would reveal a perspective on existence and experience radically different from our own or from any other.

Besides modern linguistic science, modern philosophies of language also appear to have their origin in Cartesian linguistics. Cassirer (in his Language and Myth) studies the creative aspect of language in reference to mythology. Language possesses the power of metaphor and of logic; metaphor expands into myth, and thence into art; logic expands into reason and thence into science.[2]

Kenneth Burke explores the creative possibilities of language in another direction. His view of language ('dramatism') emphasizes the function of language as a manifestation of humanity. He sees man as the symbol-using animal, and language as

the ultimat symbol used by man. Man is the inventor of the negative; there are no 'negatives' in nature, but language carries within itself the power of negation, which is the basis of human moral systems (the "Thou shalt not" syndrome). Man is the inventor of tools, and language is the most useful of these tools; as tools separate man from his natural environment, so does language separate him from the realm of natural, animal action. Man is 'moved by the sense of order', and language structures the world for its speaker. Man is a perfectionist, and language possesses the principle of perfection in its naming and defining functions (as well as the idea of perfection found in prescriptive grammars).[3]

Merleau-Ponty treats the creative aspect of language as a psycho-philosophical phenomenon. He goes as far as to replace thought by speech; what we normally call 'thought' is redefined as 'parole originaire'; 'parole secondaire' refers, generally, to what we call speech. He sees language as "oblique and autonomous; it expresses as much by what is between words as by the words themselves."[4] This obliqueness of language, which refers to what will be called 'language as signification', had been stated earlier by Freud and at least suggested by Sade.[5] Language possesses a 'hidden meaning'; what we say may mean a great deal more than the words themselves.

Since Molière lived in a century in which the bases for modern language theories were developed, his work should undoubtedly reflect certain contemporary trends. Before attempting to determine to what extent this is true, it seems useful to summarize very generally the different interpretations of his work since his day. His contemporaries seem to have regarded him as the most outstanding comic actor, director and dramatist of his day, with a vocal minority considering him a menace to public morals. The eighteenth century saw him as a precursor of the 'philosophes', an 'honnête homme' who subscribed to the highest values of civilization and promulgated these in his plays. The nineteenth century interpreted him, on one hand, as an example of Boileau's esthetic doctrine and, on the other hand, as now a defender and now an opponent of bourgeois morality. The first half of the twentieth century carried over eighteenth and nineteenth-century approaches while introducing that of metaphysical comedy.[6] Since about the middle of the twentieth century, research has been based primarily on Molière as actor and dramatist, from which base esthetic and other conceptual elements have been derived. The emphasis of the present study is in line with the last mentioned, as it focuses on the plays themselves as chief sources of information. Secondary sources, of course, are also uti-

lized. Three of these are of particular importance in that they deal with the role of language in classical dramatic theory, Molière's own use of language, and the changing concepts of language through time.

The first of these is Jacques Scherer's La Dramaturgie classique en France,[7] especially those chapters dealing with the various forms of dramatic action. Scherer considers both theory and practice in writing about the various aspects of the classical theatre. Although he treats of no one dramatist in particular, he does use examples from many, including Molière.

Scherer enumerates, defines and illustrates the various kinds of dramatic diction (tirade, récits, monologues, etc.). It is felt that a repetition of these is unnecessary here. However, Scherer does bring to light several points that appear to be of particular interest to this study. In speaking of the tirade, he tells us that it is necessary to the seventeenth-century concept of the theatre; that it is used by Molière as well as by the other dramatists (p. 225); that this omnipresence of the tirade reveals the primarily discursive nature of the theatre, in which, according to d'Aubignac, "parler, c'est agir" (p. 226).[8] Molière does criticize the tirade, although admitting its effectiveness (pp. 227-228).

The development of stichomythia into 'répétition moliéresque' also bears mentioning. Stichomythia originally referred to "un dialogue où chaque réplique s'étend seulement sur un vers et s'oppose à la parole de l'interlocuteur" (p. 302). It is emphasized that "chaque réplique emplit exactement un vers, ni plus ni moins" (p. 303). However, stichomythia evolves to a point at which it becomes "un dialogue très rapide et très coupé," in which the rejoinders are considerably less than one verse in length (p. 306). The 'répétition moliéresque' refers to a "stichomythie où les personnages expriment exactement les mêmes idées et les mêmes sentiments en n'employant jamais les mêmes mots" (p. 350). The name 'répétition moliéresque' comes from Molière's frequent use of this type of repetition. Scherer also points out that "le succès de la répétition moliéresque, dû à sa valeur musicale, à sa souplesse, et au parallélisme de situations qu'elle souligne adroitement, n'est nullement limité au domaine de la comédie" (p. 356).

A final quotation from Scherer comes under the chapter "Les Bienséances" and the sub-chapter "Les idées et les mots":

> "....la vraisemblance est une exigence intellectuelle; elle demande une certaine cohésion entre les éléments de la pièce de théâtre, elle proscrit l'absurde et l'arbitraire, ou du moins ce que le public consi-

> dère comme tel. La bienséance est une exigence morale; elle demande que la pièce de théâtre ne choque pas les goûts, les idées morales, ou, si l'on veut, les préjugés du public" (p. 383).

This passage indicates that the words (and undoubtedly the other theatrical elements as well) should not conflict with the intellectual and moral ideas of the spectators. The spectators may thus be said to provide a moral and intellectual standard within which a play must be interpretable. Should a playwright's own moral and intellectual ideas differ from those of the spectator, he must necessarily silence the former and subscribe, on stage at leaast, to the latter.

These quotations from Scherer may serve to indicate a few aspects of the background necessary to this work. It appears that the problem of language was a very real one to the theoreticians of the seventeenth-century theatre, so much so that, at least for some, dramatic action and speech are seen as equivalent one to the other. Molière himself used the same forms of dramatic language as his contemporaries, but, in at least one respect, developped it to a point well beyond its original manifestation. And, in at least one other instance, he criticized the tirade, which, according to Scherer, was of the essence of the classical concept of theatre. Finally, the language of the

theatre, as well as its other dramatic elements, was to conform to (or at least was not to conflict with) the moral and intellectual standards of the spectators.

The second document to be considered here is W. G. Moore's chapter on "Speech" in his Molière: A New Criticism.[9] The intent of the work is to present Molière as a dramatist rather than as a moralist, philosopher, or anything else (p. 5). The chapters of the book treat of the various aspects of Molière's dramatic art (Mime, Mask, Scene, etc.), of which speech is an evidently necessary one.

Moore indicates Molière's debt to the commedia dell'arte, in which speech was subordinate to gesture and improvised by the actors during the dramatic situation (p. 54). He points out the advantage of comedy over tragedy, in that the former was free "to use ordinary speech and gesture, and not trammelled by the tradition of stilted declamation against which Molière rebelled even in tragedy" (p. 53). Even the language of the printed texts has been found to be "naturally suited to the gestures implied in the words", indicating "a singularly close alliance of word and gesture" (p. 54).[10]

In analyzing Molière's diction, Moore finds that it possesses "the dramatic quality par excellence, the quality of compressed and explosive

life" (pp. 55-56); this seems to derive from farce, whose purpose was "to shock and fascinate by the illusion of life, to be alive, at the cost of crudity, indecency, unreality, improbability. The strain runs, refined and purified, through Molière's whole work" (p. 56).

Moore sees Molière's comic characters in conflict with language; they lose the ability to express themselves in civilized speech and revert to incoherence or speechlesness, the mark of natural, animal man (p. 57).

Language is basically communication; communication requires a speaker, an utterance, and a hearer; any interference with this process of communication may produce a comic situation (p. 57). Comic instances thus arise when something "is not heard, or not grasped, or misinterpreted" (p. 57). Similarly, incomprehensibility (which arises when speech does not convey what the speaker wants it to) is comic (p. 58). Incoherence, the inability to verbalize what one has in mind, is also comic; "Molière is alive to the comedy of the position of having to define the indefinable" (p. 59). Another type of comic speech is nonsense, usually based on professional jargon used out of context (p. 62). Finally, dramatic irony, in which the user of language says one thing while believing he is saying something completely different, is used to per-

fection by Molière (pp. 64-65).

Generalizing, Moore sees comedy as consisting largely "of this use of language against the intention of the user but obeying the intention of the dramatist" (p. 65). Comedy brings to light a facet of human speech which is seldom exposed; "Comic drama elicits the utterance of what in most of us is buried, suppressed, unutterable" (p. 65). By exposing the tyranny of social language, Molière's theatre provides a relief from the strain of convention, so that, in this respect, he "was the liberator of his age" (p. 65).

Besides this enumeration of the various ways in which Molière uses speech for comic effect, Moore also indicates a reference by Molière which seems to reveal an awareness of the philosophical problems of language. In the preface to Tartuffe, Molière writes that "on doit discourir des choses et non pas des mots...la plupart des contrariétés viennent de ne pas entendre et d'envelopper dans un même mot des choses opposées...il ne faut qu'ôter le voile de l'équivoque." Moore goes on:

> "This is not only a description of the accomplishment of his own dramatic irony; it is an admission that should be placed where I think it belongs, beside the argument of Pascal in the fragment on L'Esprit Géométrique. Both men discerned the fatal flaw in reasoning that originates in the fact that the same thing may be understood in dif-

> ferent ways. Language as disguise: Molière could not remain blind to this while he unmasked so many social disguises. Does not 'la dévotion' in his play mean different things to different people? What was a libertin? Cléante complains that 'c'est être libertin que d'avoir de bons yeux'. It is all a question of what you mean. What you intend to say and what you do say are often quite different. In speech as in act there may rise to the surface with or without our knowledge fragments of the subterranean world in every man" (pp. 66-67).

For Moore, then, it appears that the philosophical problem of language, as seen by Molière, is its ambiguity. If words can be defined in different ways, communication becomes difficult and sometimes impossible. This ambiguity may be successfully used in a dramatic situation (it corresponds to Moore's definition of dramatic irony); however, outside the theatrical environment, it may lead to serious misunderstandings. And, in the play under consideration, it is noteworthy that the ambiguity derives from differing interpretations of the play's significance.

The third work to be considered is Michel Foucault's Les Mots et les Choses: une archéologie des sciences humaines.[11] Foucault's purpose is to study the development of the basic principles determining Western systems of knowledge, concentrating

on the changing concepts of language, which he finds related to changes in economic and scientific systems.

Beginning with the sixteenth century and continuing until modern times, Foucault finds two radical breaks in western epistomology: the first, at the beginning of the seventeenth century; the second, at the beginning of the nineteenth (p. 13).

Sixteenth-century knowledge is based on the principle of 'ressemblance' (p. 44); that of the classical period is based on 'représentation' (p. 14); and that of modern times on 'signification' (p. 14).

In the sixteenth century, the world is composed of signs; objects and words are both signs which conceal an interior reality which can be known by whoever can decipher can decipher the signs (p. 48). Language is one of the 'figures du monde', as are objects; all of these 'figures du monde' are enigmatic in that they contain a secret to be uncovered (p. 49). Everything that exists is a sign; indeed, words and objects are inseparable; "les choses elles-mêmes cachent et manifestent leur énigme comme un langage.....les mots se proposent aux hommes comme des choses à déchiffrer" (p. 50).

Language is meant to be written rather than spoken, for "ce que Dieu a déposé dans le monde, ce sont des mots écrits" (p. 53). From this sacred nature of the written word there derives a "non-dis-

tinction entre ce qu'on voit et ce qu'on lit," as well as the importance of commentary (p. 54).

The object of knowledge becomes primarily a linguistic one. "Savoir consiste donc à rapporter du langage à du langage. A restituer la grande plaine uniforme des mots et des choses. A tout faire parler" (p. 55).

To illustrate this interaction of word and object, Foucault uses the example of a "couche uniforme où s'entrecroisaient indéfiniment le vu et le lu, le visible et l'énonçable" (p. 58). This structure, however, disappears in the seventeenth century; it becomes binary; word and object are separated into 'signifiant' and 'signifié' (p. 57).

> "Cette nouvelle disposition entraîne l'apparition d'un nouveau problème, jusque-là inconnu: en effet on s'était demandé comment reconnaître qu'un signe désignait bien ce qu'il signifiait; à partir du XVII^e siècle on se demandera comment un signe peut être lié à ce qu'il signifie. Question à laquelle l'âge classique répondra par l'analyse de la représentation; et à laquelle la pensée moderne répondra par l'analyse du sens et de la signification" (p. 58).

One result of this new perspective is that language becomes an object of representation and, in the nineteenth century, one of signification. "Les choses et les mots vont se séparer. L'oeil sera des-

tiné à voir, et à voir seulement; l'oreille à seulement entendre. Le discours aura bien pour tâche de dire ce qui est, mais il ne sera rien de plus que ce qu'il dit" (p. 58).

The separation of word and object produces what Foucault calls "les idoles de la tribu, fictons spontanées de l'esprit" (p. 66). That is, what one sees is taken as reality on the popular level, rather than as sign. Likewise, the "idoles du forum" develop; "un seul et même nom s'applique indifféremment à des choses qui ne sont pas de même nature" (p. 66). The separation of word and object has produced confusion and therefore a new perspective on both the popular and the learned levels.

Language is no longer a "figure du monde", a form or a mark of truth. "La vérité trouve sa manifestation et son signe dans la perception évidente et distincte." Language may or may not be capable of translation this truth; in any case, it has no necessary relationship to it. "Le langage se retire du milieu des êtres pour entrer dans son âge de transparence et de neutralité" (p. 70). "Au seuil de l'âge classique, le signe cesse d'être une figure du monde; et il cesse d'être lié à ce qu'il marque par des liens solides et secrets de la ressemblance ou de l'affinité" (p. 72).

The sixteenth century had postulated a

"texte primitif", a universal and absolute language of truth beneath the universe of signs. The classical period a 'langage arbitraire' whose function is analytical and critical, a language that represents, that is 'bien faite', that is "réellement la langue des calculs." This arbitrary language should become "un système de symboles artificiels et d'opération de nature logique" (pp. 76-77).

As there is no necessary relationship between the sign and its content, the sign is re-defined as that which represents; the sign is both "indication et apparaître", it refers to something other than itself and it manifests itself. The sign, then, "c'est la <u>representativité</u> de la représentation en tant qu'elle est <u>représentable</u>" (pp. 77-78).

The representation in question is that of "la pensée tout entière" (p. 79); language, as a sign system, should and can "représenter la pensée" in the sense that "la pensée se représente elle-même" (p. 92). Language and thought are therefore quite close, although they do not coincide. "Le langage classique est beaucoup plus proche qu'on ne croit de la pensée qu'il est chargé de manifester; mais il ne lui est pas parallèle; il est pris dans son réseau et tissé dans la trame même qu'elle déroule. Non pas effet extérieur de la pensée, mais pensée elle-même" (pp. 92-93). In manifesting thought, language itself

becomes a form of thought. The value of language is then that of representation; this verbal representation becomes 'discours', replacing the 'érudition' of the sicteenth century (p. 93). This discourse is also studied in its capacity for representation rather than as a key to knowledge; the result is 'la critique': sixteenth-century commentary is replaced by the criticism of the classical period (pp. 93-94). This latter remains necessarily ambiguous, for it is the representation of a representation in terms of representation (p. 94). As it is of the same nature as that which it represents, it lacks the distance necessary for concrete judgment.

At this point, Foucault has mentioned the major differences between the sixteenth-century concept of knowledge and that of the seventeenth century. Sixteenth-century theories of knowledge are based on the idea of 'ressemblance'; there is a resemblance between sign and content, between word and object. All signs conceal truth and so present an enigma; the engima can be solved by the erudite, by those who study the signs and explain them through commentary. The most valid signs are the most ancient, for they are closer in time to the creation and so more likely to interpret the original truth. The seventeenth century, on the other hand, sees no assured relationship between sign and content.

Truth is found in that which is clear and distinct, rather than hidden in sign systems. Signs, and so language, are valuable in their capacity of representing. Language is to represent thought and, in so doing, becomes a form of thought. As representation, language is a discourse rather than erudition; the study of this discourse is a representation of a representation, a criticism instead of a commentary.

Because of the importance of Foucault's work to this study, a few examples will be given to clarify the linguistic categories he considers.

Modern manifestations of 'ressemblance' can be seen in echoic words, such as French 'tonnerre', English 'thunder' and 'bow'wow; these words supposedly resemble their content. In the custom of giving nicknames, 'ressemblance' is also used: names such as 'Shorty' and 'Red' should have some affinity with their bearers' appearance. And, of course, it is probable that most family names originated in like manner.

In the Middle Ages, 'ressemblance' might be manifested by an attempt to draw affinities between a person's name and his character. Saint Cecilia's name, for example, might be interpreted as <u>coeli lilia</u>, 'lily of heaven'; then again, by the same writer, as <u>caecis via</u>, 'the way for the blind'.[12] It would be impossible for the name to have both ori-

gins; it was sufficient that it resembled certain aspects of that person's life or character.

Examples of 'représentation' can be found in modern computer languages; it is also evident in dialects of the same language, where one word may have two different meanings. For example, 'char' refers to a chariot in France, but to an automobile in French Canada and Louisiana. Likewise, modern slang offers many examples of arbitrary representation; the English word 'pot', depending on who utters it, can have at least two radically different meanings.

Language as 'signification' refers to the possibility of language having a meaning beyond whatever its words represent. In historical linguistics, a word has meaning in relationship to its 'historicité'; that is, its function as a product of a historical or evolutionary development. 'Signification' thus suggests that the meaning of words lies outside the words themselves. In psychoanalysis, that meaning would lie in the subconscious; in other branches of study, it might lie in exterior causes, such as one's society, culture, or environment. Meaning may also lie in the different structures of different languages. Take, for example, the English or French sentence:

He puts the hat on the table.
Il met le chapeau sur la table.

If either of these sentences were structurally outlined, the result might be something like:

pronoun - verb - article - noun object -
- preposition - article - noun object

The corresponding sentence in Mandarin Chinese would be:

Ta ba maudz fang dzai jwodz shang.

Its structural outline would probably be something like this:

pronoun - instrumental morpheme - noun -
verb - directional morpheme - noun -
spatial morpheme

If this sentence were rendered using English vocabulary, the result would be similar to this:

He taking hat put(s) at table upon.

Although the sentences represent the same act, their different structures suggest a different meaning. A linguist might say, for example, that the French and English sentences emphasize causality where the Mandarin sentence expresses a sequence of events.

From the three preceding works, a general picture of the role of language in the seventeenth century and in relationship to Molière may be drawn.

1. Language in the seventeenth century functions as representation. It has no necessary relationship or resemblance to its content. It means what it means because its speakers agree to this meaning.

2. By representing itself, language produces discourse and criticism. These replace the erudition and commentary of the pre-classical period.

3. The language of the theatre is primarily discursive; it is seen by some as equivalent to dramatic action.

4. Molière's theatre has its roots in Italian farce, in which language is subordinate to other dramatic elements (gesture, movement, costume, etc.).

5. Molière uses the same linguistic devices as his contemporaries; however, he criticizes some of these while using them, and develops others to extents beyond his contemporaries.

6. Molière's most effective and original use of language is in the development of dramatic irony, which consists primarily of using language against the wishes of the comic character but in accordance with the intentions of the playwright.

7. Molière seems aware of the philosophical problems of language. These derive principally from its ambiguity.

The above statements appear to reflect the most recent opinions on this aspect of Molière and the seventeenth century. However, they are incomplete in that they do not deal with the relationship of language to the totality of Molière's work. That is therefore the purpose of the present study.

An analysis of Molière's plays, with particular attention to the categories of language out-

lined by M. Foucault, appears to reveal that the comic dramatist's concept of language is a dynamic, changing one. At the beginning of his career, he seems to have emphasized language chiefly in terms of 'ressemblance'. He then appears to have shifted the emphasis until he was in conformity to his time, using language primarily in its representative capacity. The possibilities of representative language are exploited until, near the end of his life, Molière seems to have abandoned 'représentation', replacing it with language as 'signification'. If this structure is accepted as valid, it would indicate that Molière went well beyond the intellectual and dramatic limitations of his day; such a perspective should provide a framework for further studies on the esthetic and philosophical dimensions of his theatre.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

[1]Information concerning the development of linguistics has been summarized from several sources, notably Noam Chomsky's Cartesian Linguistics: A Chapter in the History of Rationalist Thought. Harper and Row (New York; London), 1966; and Margaret Schlauch's Language and the Study of Languages Today. Oxford University Press (London), 1967. Information on Saussure has also been obtained from J.-B. Fages, Comprendre le Structuralisme. Privat (Toulouse), 1967, pp. 19-44. For further details of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, see Benjamin Lee Whorf, Language, Thought, and Reality. Ed. John B. Carroll, the M.I.T. Press (Cambridge), 1956.

[2]Ernst Cassirer, Language and Myth. Translated by Suzanne K. Langer, Dover (New York), 1946.

[3]Kenneth Burke, Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method. University of California Press (Berkely; Los Angeles), 1966.

[4]Philip E. Lewis, "Merleau'Ponty and the phenomenology of language", in Yale French Studies, #36-37 (Structuralism, ed. Jacques Ehrmann), Eastern Press (New Haven), 1966, pp. 19-40.

[5]Michel Foucault, Les Mots et les Choses: une archéologie des sciences humaines. Gallimard (Paris), 1966, p. 134.

[6]Antoine Adam, Histoire de la littérature française au XVII^e siècle. Domat (Paris), tome III, 1952, p. 403.

[7]Jacques Scherer, La Dramaturgie classique en France. Nizet (Paris), 1959.

[8]Scaliger also equates language with action; see A. Donald Sellstrom, "Rhetoric and the Poetics of French Classicism", The French Review, April, 1961; xxxiv, 5, pp. 425-426. The same is upheld by W. G. Moore, in his Molière: A New Criticism. Oxford (London), 1949, p. 53.

[9]W. G. Moore, Ibid., pp. 53-67.

[10]Louis Jouvet is apparently one of those actors who find this so, as he indicates several times in his Molière et la Comédie classique. Gallimard (Paris), 1965.

[11]See footnote #5.

[12]Schlauch, op. cit., p. 8.

CHAPTER II

LANGUAGE AS 'RESSEMBLANCE': FROM FARCE TO FANTASY

In an epistomological system based on 'ressemblance', language functions as the clearest of signs in a universe composed of signs. All signs indicate a higher reality which can be determined by the erudite, those whose profession it is to decipher the enigma of existence. On the popular level, however, the interpretation of signs must necessarily be more immediate and less demanding. Again, on the level of the 'tribu', it is not necessary for language to enjoy the primacy it holds in the 'forum'; such a primacy depends on study and commentary and therefore must be reserved for a certain intellectual class.

It is within the system of 'ressemblance' that Molière's early farces seem to fall. The basic elements of these are noise, movement, mask and object.[1] Language is but one aspect of noise, neither more nor less important than the other farce elements, and thus possessing no primacy. It is the farce as a whole that functions as a sign, possessing a 'ressemblance' to or affinity with the ridiculous. So thoroughly does the sign envelop its content that the farce not only resembles the

ridiculous, it is ridiculous.

The manifestations of Molière's early farces clearly bear this out. The farce is evidently a collective communication on all levels; the spectators are not only observers, they are participants in the action. When the 'barbouillé' requests that they justify his version of what has occurred, they must participate by validating the opposite version.[2] The language of the farce corresponds to Antonin Artaud's concept of the true language of the theatre;[3] it is a language of gesture and movement rather than a purely verbal one; again, as Artaud suggests, the actors often use spontaneous language; there are indications in the text that the actor improvise at different points. This improvisation must have depended on the type of rapport the actors developed with different audiences, and may well have been more extensive than the manuscripts indicate.

The characters 'speak' not only with words but also by their costumes, actions, and through their appellations. There is no ambiguity in a farce; the name 'barbouillé' is evidently used to refer to an unattractive personnage whose dress and actions complement the name. Gros-René and Sganarelle are evidently comic characters; Angé-

lique is not necessarily angelical, but must appear so in contrast to her drunken husband, whereas elsewhere she is engaged in pursuits that are far removed from those of the celestial hosts. The titles 'docteur' and 'avocat' must necessarily refer to pedants.

The Italian farces, which greatly influenced Molière, had utilized a language incomprehensible to most of their spectators, but their productions lost none of their effect because of that. Traces of this can be found in the speech of pedants in Molière's early farces (and even in his later works). Mutterings, gibberish and galimatias are used for comic effect; this helps to place emphasis on what Simon calls the 'resonant shell' of language;[4] its supra-segmental phonemes (volume, tone, pitch, rhythm, accent, etc.) are used to their greatest comic advantage.

The language of farce, then, is only partially a verbal one. It is a collective communication, involving audience participation; it is an unambiguous sign of what is ridiculous. Its purpose might be, to use Foucault's terminology, "à tout faire parler", with 'tout' defined as the comic aspect of the human condition as well as all the available devices of the farcical theatre. As such, it is a popular manifestation of the epistomological concept of 'ressemblance'. Words, objects,

and actions all function as signs; all share the same signal essence.

After the early farces there is, as we shall see later, a movement of language towards 'représentation'. However, 'ressemblance' can be seen in many of Molière's comic victims; indeed, they are comic (and sometimes insane) precisely because they do subscribe to a system of 'ressemblances' in an age of 'représentation'. Orgon, for example, interprets Tartuffe's words (and, indeed, his every action) as a clear sign of his piety and sincerity; the other characters see Tartuffe as a representation of what he is not. Amphitryon shares a similar problem, but with a different emphasis: he must convince others that he, and he alone, has an essential affinity with the name 'Amphitryon'. The others, however, are faced with the ambiguity of language as representation: the same name may represent two different objects. A third example is George Dandin, who believes that words such as 'noblesse' and 'mariage' are clear signs of a certain reality; when he discovers that that reality is meaningless, he is obliged either to accept the ambiguities of representative language or withdraw himself from the scene. The former choice is too humiliating, so he opts for suicide.

In Le Mariage forcé, the concept of lan-

guage as 'ressemblance' is actually verbalized and ridiculed on the stage. Pancrace, an Aristotelian philosopher and ridiculous pedant, gives the following oral dissertation to Sganarelle:

> "La parole a été donnée à l'homme pour expliquer sa pensée; et tout ainsi que les pensées sont les portraits des choses, de même nos paroles sont-elles les portraits de nos pensées.... Mais ces portraits diffèrent des autres portraits en ce que les autres portraits sont distingués partout de leurs originaux, et que la parole enferme en soi son original, puisqu'elle n'est autre chose que la pensée expliquée par un signe extérieur; d'où vient que ceux qui pensent bien sont aussi ceux qui parlent le mieux. Expliquez-moi donc votre pensée par la parole, qui est le plus intelligible de tous les signes..... Oui, la parole est <u>animi index et speculum</u> (l'indice et le miroir de l'âme). C'est un miroir qui nous présente naivement les secrets les plus arcanes de nos individus: et, puisque vous avez la faculté de ratiociner et de parler tout ensemble, à quoi tient-il que vous ne vous serviez de la parole pour me faire entendre votre pensée?"[5]

Here is the theory of language as 'ressemblance': The clearest and most intelligible of signs; portrait, container and explicator of what it refers to; exterior thought, and revealer of the hidden self.

In the same play, a pyrrhonian philosopher, whose skepticism is such as to prevent him from making any definite statement, is also put up to ridicule. By mocking the concepts of language as clarity and language as obscurity, Molière is apparently left with the concept of language as representation, with varying degrees of clarity and obscurity. And, of course, we learn here of his knowledge of certain aspects of the philosophy of language.

In the preface to Tartuffe, Molière again refers to and rejects the idea of 'ressemblance'. In drawing a distinction between the debauched comedy of the past and that of his day (as well as of antiquity), he uses this comparison:

> "Elles n'ont aucun rapport l'une avec l'autre que la ressemblance du nom; et ce serait une injustice épouvantable que de vouloir condamner Olympe, qui est femme de bien, parce qu'il y a eu une Olympe qui a été une débauchée"(Preface to Tartuffe, in Oeuvres, Pléiade, p. 887).

This is an obvious refusal of the intellectual validity of 'ressemblance', although Molière may well (and indeed will) continue to use it dramatically. Le Misanthrope, in fact, appears to contrast 'ressemblance' and certain forms of 'représentation'.

The use of language by the major characters in this play has been sketched by Raymond

Lichet. Alceste uses language in a very rigid way: a word can have one, and only one meaning. The word 'ami', for example, can no longer be applied to Philinte, for his actions do not correspond to Alceste's understanding of that word. For Philinte, language is fluid; the same word may be applied to different objects, depending on the situation. Célimène sees language as a game, never to be taken seriously and always retractable.[6]

The rigid demands Alceste makes on language seem to be based on an anachronistic concept of the verbal medium. He sees the relationship between word and object as an absolute and indivisible, even sacred, one: to separate them is to "en profaner le nom" (v. 279). This sacred relationship is, indeed, an aspect of 'ressemblance' rather than 'représentation'. Alceste demands that his words be accepted as unambiguous signs of truth, even in his lawsuit (I,i; 184-202); again, an aspect of 'ressemblance'. This linguistic anachronism conforms to other anachronisms in his character: his condemnation of contemporary society, his desire to be distinguished in a world that prefers conformity, and his preference for older poetic forms over modern sonnets.

The other characters manifest various forms

of language as representation: Philinte's fluid and Célimène's playful use of words depends on the possibility of separating the 'signifiant' from the 'signifié'; Arsinoé's hypocrisy likewise depends on the ability of language to mask thought; even Eliante's sincerity appears to be a parallel between word and object rather than an affinity, as she does not give words the sacred quality that Alceste does. This parallel between word and object is, in fact, an esthetic representation deriving from a sentimental interpretation of what is perceived, as Eliante tells us in this passage:

> L'amour, pour l'ordinaire, est
> peu fait à ces lois,
> Et l'on voit les amants toujours
> vanter leur choix.
> Jamais leur passion n'y voit
> rien de blâmable,
> Et dans l'objet aimé tout leur
> devient aimable;
> Ils comptent les défauts pour
> des perfections,
> Et savent y donner de favorables
> noms.
> La pâle est au jasmin en blancheur
> comparable;
> La noire à faire peur, une brune
> adorable;
> La maigre a de la taille et de la
> liberté;
> La grasse est, dans son port,
> pleine de majesté;
> La malpropre sur soi, de peu d'at-
> traits chargée,
> Est mise sous le nom de beauté
> négligée;
> La géante paraît une déesse aux
> yeux;
> La naine, un abrégé des merveilles
> des cieux;

> L'orgueilleuse a le coeur digne
> d'une couronne;
> La fourbe a de l'esprit; la sotte
> est toute bonne;
> La trop grande parleuse est
> d'agréable humeur;
> Et la muette garde une honnête
> pudeur (II,iv; 711-728).

This admonition to rename objects in the most favorable light is far enough removed from Alceste's rigid interpretation of the word/object situation. It can only serve to intensify the conflict between Alceste and his milieu. As this conflict has no solution, Alceste's only alternative seems to be the silence of his 'désert'.

That 'désert', however, is probably also an anachronism. It would appear to refer to an imaginary "endroit écarté/Où d'être homme d'honneur on ait la liberté." It is more likely a temporal than a spatial condition; it, too, would most probably be found in a past era of 'ressemblances', of unambiguous signs of personal honor. Since it is unattainable, Alceste remains obliged to remain in the world of representations; he will stay in society and, since his character can hardly change, will continue to repeat the same demands he has made in Célimène's salon. This interminable repetition of the same act, indeed of the same moment, makes of him a perfect comic hero.[7] He is the play's avatar, the continuous repetition of the same event throughout

time.

Since Alceste cannot escape the world in which he lives, his refusal to marry Célimène and remain in society is due either to ignorance of the situation or, equally likely, it is an act of bad faith. As an act of bad faith, it can be understood in at least two different ways. First, he would surrender to form if he remained in society married to the most sociable of women. Second, his demands to this point have been primarily verbal. Marriage with Célimène would necessitate action as well as words; Alceste would have to prove the validity of the word 'love' through all of his actions. From a critic of the world he would have to become a man of action; he would have to realize his ideals.

His refusal of Célimène is thus a use of sincerity as a mask for fear. His ideal of sincerity has itself been changed; it has evolved into a mask; it has become a verbal role that he must repeat interminably without ever letting it become authentic action. As such, Alceste has become a 'divertissement' for the society against which he has spoken so strongly.

From a position of 'ressemblance', Alceste has become a representation of 'ressemblance'. His sincerity has changed into a verbal mask and therefore a social one: he is one of those whom he criti-

cizes. He is a critic of a world which can tolerate critics; he therefore has a place in that world and, by being in it, becomes object of his own criticism.

Within this context, then, Le Misanthrope dramatizes both the conflict between 'ressemblance' and 'représentation', and the metamorphosis of the former into the latter. 'Ressemblance' is ridiculous in an age of 'représentation'; it must surrender to the stronger force and emphasize its own representativity.

In Le Médecin malgré lui, 'ressemblance' is used for obvious comic and satirical purposes. Martine says that Sganarelle is a doctor and, when he is forced to do so, he performs, in the eyes of the other characters, as well as or better than a licensed physician. A farcical resemblance or affinity develops between his actions and his appellation. The satirical elements of the play are brought out by the obvious stupidity of all the characters; Sganarelle could only fool stupid people. 'Ressemblance' has become only one of many dramatic devices used to produce comic and satirical effects. Clearly, it no longer has the pervasiveness it enjoyed in the earlier farces.

There is a very powerful dramatic use of 'ressemblance' in L'Avare. Harpagon is not only a

miser; he is also concerned about his reputation, about what others say about him. When Maître Jacques tells him that the general opinion of him is unfavorable, Harpagon beats him for his pains, telling him, "Apprenez à parler" (III,i). For Harpagon, to speak is to conform verbally to his own opinion of himself, to say what he wants to hear.

On the one hand, he is concerned about what others say about him; on the other hand, he must struggle to keep his own thoughts from being verbalized. He hears La Flèche mention avarice; he wants to know of whom he is speaking; La Flèche asks: "Est-ce que vous croyez que je veux parler de vous?" Harpagon retorts: "Je crois ce que je crois; mais je veux que tu me dises à qui tu parles quand tu dis cela" (I,iii). Harpagon believes what he believes; he will not verbalize his thoughts, yet he demands verbalization from others. For him to say what he feels is unthinkable (and, paradoxically, he fools no one, as everyone takes him for a miser).

Later, while speaking to himself, he sees Elise and Cléante, and suspects they might have overheard what he said about his money: ".....je crois que j'ai parlé haut, en raisonnant tout seul" (I,iv). Again, there is tension between thought and language. Harpagon's best recourse would be silence: if he could enjoy his money and his reputation, all

would be well. Language, in fact, is an obstacle for him; insofar as it represents his thought, it endangers his security.

Harpagon's conflict with language seems based on his inability to use representative language as the other characters do; the point at which he verbally represents his thought is when he discovers that his money is missing:

> Au voleur! au voleur! à l'assassin! au meurtrier! Justice, juste ciel! je suis perdu, je suis assassiné; on m'a coupé la gorge: on m'a dérobé mon argent. Qui peut-ce être? Qu'est-il devenu? Où est-il? Où se cache-t-il? Que ferai-je pour le trouver? Où courir? Où ne pas courir? N'est-il point là? N'est-il point ici? Qui est-ce? Arrête. (il se prend lui-même le bras) Rends-moi mon argent, coquin... Ah! c'est moi! Mon esprit est troublé, et j'ignore où je suis, qui je suis, et ce que je fais. Hélas! mon pauvre argent! mon cher ami! on m'a privé de toi; et, puisque tu m'es enlevé, j'ai perdu mon support, ma consolation, ma joie: tout est fini pour moi, et je n'ai plus que faire au monde: sans toi, il m'est impossible de vivre. C'en est fait; je n'en puis plus; je me meurs; je suis mort; je suis enterré. N'y a-t-il personne qui veuille me ressusciter, en me rendant mon cher argent, ou en m'apprenant qui l'a pris? Euh! que dites-vous? Ce n'est personne. Il faut, qui que ce soit qui ait fait le coup, qu'avec beaucoup de soin on ait épié l'heure; et l'on a choisi justement le temps que

> je parlais à mon traître de fils. Sortons. Je veux aller querir la justice, et faire donner la question à toute ma maison; à servantes, à valets, à fils, à fille, et à moi aussi. Que de gens assemblés! Je ne jette mes regards sur personne qui ne me donne des soupçons, et tout me semble mon voleur. Eh! de quoi est-ce qu'on parle là? de celui qui m'a dérobé? Quel bruit fait-on là-haut? Est-ce mon voleur qui y est? De grâce, si l'on sait des nouvelles de mon voleur, je supplie que l'on m'en dise. N'est-il point caché là parmi vous? Ils me regardent tous, et se mettent à rire. Vous verrez qu'ils ont part, sans doute, au vol que l'on m'a fait. Allons vite, des commissaires, des archers, des prévôts, des juges, des gênes, des potences et des bourreaux. Je veux faire pendre tout le monde; et, si je ne retrouve mon argent, je me pendrai moi-même après" (IV,vii).

This is also Harpagon's moment of insanity. He becomes insane when he enters the linguistic world of the other characters (and even of the spectators). He is forced to use representative language, with its ambiguities and absurdities, until he retrieves his money and can retreat into silence.

In fact, Harpagon substitutes his money for language. His use of the words 'cassette' and 'argent' interchangeably indicates this. From the point of view of 'représentation', the 'cassette' would conform to the 'signifiant' and the 'argent to the

'signifié'. For Harpagon, however, this distinction does not exist; the 'cassette' is a clear and unmistakable sign of its content, his money. Harpagon can abandon verbal language, for he has replaced it with an unambiguous object over which he holds absolute power.

La Flèche's famous description, "Le seigneur Harpagon est de tous les humains l'humain le moins humain", takes on added significance when seen against Harpagon's concept of language. He does not want language to represent; he fights against its representative qualities. This alone makes him a stranger to contemporary society; he would prefer isolation and silence to the company of others. Again, he wants a favorable reputation, but does absolutely nothing to procure even the semblance of one. This desire for isolation and the approbation of others suggests that Harpagon would gladly become his cassette if he could: a complete object, prized for its value, but having to give nothing in return other than its presence. It is thus understandable that he should equate the loss of his cassette with the loss of his life, as the quotation cited above shows (He equates "On m'a coupé la gorge" with "On m'a dérobé mon argent"). It is by this desire to make an object of himself, a thing, that Harpagon is inhuman. Likewise, the affinity he sees between

himself and his money is a further demonstration of the attitude of 'ressemblance'. He has avoided Alceste's error; instead of becoming a verbal representation of 'ressemblance', he has replaced representative language with an unambiguous object that provides all the communication he requires.

Monsieur de Pourceaugnac carries 'ressemblance' to its limits by using it as a justification for victimage. Pourceaugnac is defined through his name; there must be an affinity between the two. Nérine (I,i) tells us:

> "Le seul nom de monsieur de Pourceaugnac m'a mis dans une colère effroyable. J'enrage de monsieur de Pourceaugnac. Quand il n'y aurait que ce nom-là, monsieur de Pourceaugnac, j'y brûlerai mes livres, ou je romprai ce mariage; et vous ne serez point madame de Pourceaugnac. Pourceaugnac! cela se peut-il souffrir? Non, Pourceaugnac est une chose que je ne saurais supporter....."

Pourceaugnac is described through his name; since the name is ridiculous, the character is obviously ridiculous as well. It is interesting that Nérine goes from the 'nom', Pourceaugnac, to the 'chose', equating the two. Without ever having seen him, she defines him as a worthy object of victimage. This definition is validated by Sbrigani

(and, later, by Pourceaugnac's presence). The name does fit the person; Pourceaugnac is ugly, stupid and gullible. And, of course, he is supposed to marry Julie against her will; this is adequate justification for the planned trickery. Furthermore, Pourceaugnac is a provincial nobleman; he is fair game for the Parisian audience.

Pourceaugnac, in fact, is very much a farce character. As soon as he enters (I, iii), we realize that his presence is designed to provoke laughter; he is followed by a group of people laughing at him. His bearing, his costume, and his stupidity all distinguish him as a comic object. And, throughout the play, a great deal of farce is evident, intermixed with dancing and comic language. Pourceaugnac must necessarily be presented as a farce type; otherwise the victimage would appear excessive, especially coming from two characters as admittedly unscrupulous as Nérine and Sbrigani (Sbrigani has been exiled from Naples for his crimes; Nérine, among other things, has helped hang two innocent people). The actions of the conspirators can be taken as comic only if one accepts the necessarily ridiculous nature of their victim; he is made to be laughed at. And 'ressemblance' is utilized to help assure this.

Pourceaugnac, then, resembles Molière's earliest farces in several ways. However, it also points out the mechanism used in constructing a farce and, in so doing, seems to raise several questions. The action of the play is simply a farce arranged by Sbrigani and Nérine with Pourceaugnac as the victim. When one considers the meanness of the conspirators, the naiveté of the victim, and the dependance of the farce upon 'ressemblance' (Which Molière has previously rejected), a possible pattern seems to be suggested. On one hand, Molière seems to have realized that there is an element of cruelty in laughter;[8] on the other hand, he may well be rejecting the idea of farce as he had earlier rejected that of 'ressemblance'. Of course, just as he had continued to use elements of 'ressemblance' after rejecting the validity of the concept, so he will continue using elements of farce even after having rejected its validity.

The final noteworthy use of 'ressemblance' is found in Le Malade imaginaire. Toinette's normal speech is a hearty peasant one, somewhat similar to that of Mme Jourdain in Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme. Once disguised as a doctor, however, she immediately adopts the profession's manner of speech, speaking as ably as Purgon or Diafoirus. This affinity between costume and speech foreshadows the dénoue-

ment, when Argan will do precisely the same thing. As Béralde tells Argan:

> "En recevant la robe et le bonnet de médecin, vous apprendrez tout cela /all that a doctor knows/; et vous serez après plus habile que vous ne voudrez."

And also:

> "L'on n'a qu'à parler avec une robe et un bonnet, tout galimatias devient savant, et toute sottise devient raison" (III, xiv).

Following this comes the final scene, in which an imaginary invalid becomes an imaginary doctor in an imaginary ceremony. 'Ressemblance' metamorphoses into fantasy. As we shall have accasion to see, this play also treats language as representation and as signification. However, for the moment it must be seen as the conclusion of Molière's relationship to the problem of 'ressemblance'.

Molière's earliest farces are based on the epistomological theory of 'ressemblance'; his later plays continue to use it for characterization and for satirical purposes; he rejects its intellectual validity on at least two occasions and contrasts it with 'représentation' in Le Misanthrope; it is the basis for Harpagon's inhumanity

in L'Avare and for the cruelty of Pourceaugnac; in the latter play there seems to be a rejection of the validity of farce. Finally, 'ressemblance' metamorphoses into fantasy in Molière's last play.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

[1]Alfred Simon, "The Elementary Rites of Molière's Comedy," trans. by Stirling Haig, in Molière: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Jacques Guicharnaud, Prentice-Hall (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.), 1964, p. 29.

[2]Scene xii, in Molière, Oeuvres Complètes, ed. Georges Couton, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. Gallimard (Paris), vol. 1, 1971, p. 24. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Molière's works will be taken from this edition.

[3]Antonin Artaud, Le Théâtre et son double. Gallimard (Paris), 1964, pp. 167-169.

[4]Simon, op. cit., p. 32.

[5]Molière, Oeuvres complètes, ed. Pierre-Aimé Touchard, Editions du Seuil (Paris), 1962, p. 230.

[6]Raymond Lichet, "Le Misanthrope et le langage," in Le Français dans le monde, jan-fév, 1967, pp. 41-43.

[7]Georges Poulet, Etudes sur le temps humain. Plon (Paris), vol. I, 1949, p. 86 and elsewhere. Poulet speaks of the "procédé essentiellement répétitif par lequel le personnage moliéresque ne cesse de se manifester dans la durée." Again according to Poulet, Molière prevents this repetition from becoming tragic by removing its temporal momentum; this leads to the creation of a type instead of a character (p. 87).

[8]This, of course, is Freudian. W. G. Moore (op. cit., pp. 124-125) suggests Molière's awareness of the unconscious principles of human behavior.

CHAPTER III

REPRESENTATIVE LANGUAGE: ACTION AND AMBIGUITY

Representative language is a human phenomenon; it does not derive from an original language of divine truth, but is constructed by human beings for human ends. As such, it has no necessary relationship to 'truth'; truth is that which is clearly and evidently true rather than something concealed by a system of enigmatic signs. Language may represent truth, but it bears no affinity with it. The ideal language is one as clear and logical as mathematics; since this ideal language does not exist, representative language is necessarily ambiguous: different objects may have the same name, or different names may be applied to the same object. Because of its lack of affinity with truth, representative language loses the primacy enjoyed by the language of 'ressemblance'; emphasis is placed on the relationship between word and object: how well does language represent its content? Thus the binary division into 'signifiant' and 'signifié' and the beginning of the objective study of language.

If representation, then action: to represent verbally a thought or a feeling is to alter

it (however slightly), to judge it and to present it for judgement, and thus to act upon it. The role of language as action was evident to seventeenth-century literary theoreticians,[1] and is carried on today in the works of modern thinkers.[2] As action, language is also creation: this was as evident to Descartes[3] as it is to Merleau-Ponty[4] and, as we shall see, as it may well have been to Molière.

L'Etourdi, Molière's first full-length play, dramatizes a conflict between language and action. Mascarille is the servant of Lélie, who loves Célie. The servant uses language to help his master attain his beloved, while Lélie attempts to win her through 'heroic' actions.[5] Both fail, and it is only through an improbable dénouement, in which Lélie's rival turns out to be Célie's brother, that a happy ending is assured. A probable situation metamorphoses into an improbable one. An equally improbable situation opens the next play, Dépit amoureux: a girl has been raised to maturity while disguised as a boy. This basic situation quite logically produces a play in which the invalidity of signs, both verbal and visual, is stressed. Mascarille reappears in this play, but he is so ineffective that he is unrecognizable from the dramatic Mascarille of L'Etourdi. His character has metamor-

phosed as radically as the dramatic universe in which he finds himself. Of course, the improbable world of the Dépit must change to a probable one before a satisfactory ending is possible.

There appears to be a certain structural liaison between these two plays, as they dramatize the transformation of a probable world into an improbable one and then back into the realm of probability. In L'Etourdi, language is used as a form of dramatic action; in the Dépit, a common source for verbal and visual signs is given in the personnage of Ascagne/Dorothée. The first play demonstrates the possibilities of representative language while the second points out the weaknesses in language as a sign of truth. 'Représentation', it would appear, has more possibilities than 'ressemblance'. The change from one to the other is symbolized by the change in Mascarille's character: the name 'Mascarille' has no affinity with any specific type; it is simply a verbal representation of a character in a comedy, whose 'mask' changes with every play.

Mascarille returns in Les Précieuses ridicules, and here he is again different from the Mascarille of the preceding plays. He is no longer the fourbum imperator of L'Etourdi or the confused

servant of the Dépit amoureux; he is primarily a farcical personnage. In the preface to this play, Molière tells us that "une grande partie des grâces qu'on y a trouvées dépendent de l'action et du ton de voix",[6] and this is particularly true for Mascarille. The certain command of précieux language that he enjoys is overshadowed by his outlandish costume, his fighting with the chair bearers, his screaming out of the words of his 'impromptu', his comic (and even indecent?) gestures, and his final beating, undressing, and ejection from Gorgibus' home. He is a farceur who enjoys a certain command of language, as Cathos and Madelon are précieuses who also partake of the farcical. Their comic effect derives principally from their absurd use of language; in this respect, we can say that farce and comic language are contrasted in this play. Molière seems to have realized here that the language of certain social groups may be comic in contrast to ordinary language (that of the spectators) or even in contrast to farce. In that sense, he has isolated language as a comic element in itself: what is said may be as comic as how it is said or as the actions that accompany its saying. And, of course, the fact that the précieuses insist on renaming objects is another use of representative language.

In Sganarelle ou le cocu imaginaire, the invalidity of visual signs is emphasized. Sganarelle's wife sees her husband with Célie and immediately assumes that he is carrying on with every girl in town; Sganarelle sees his wife admiring Lélie's picture and assumes that he is her lover. Lélie then sees his picture in Sganarelle's hands, asks him where he received it and, when told that it came from Sganarelle's wife, assumes that Mme Sganarelle must be Célie, his beloved. These visual misconceptions produce greater complexities until each character verbalizes his version of what has happened; visual errors are corrected through verbal representation. When we consider the importance of visual effects in Molière's early farces, the significance of this play's structure is apparent: representative language has reached a higher level of validity in the dramatic production.

In Dom Garcie de Navarre, the various possibilities of representative language are dramatized. Dom Garcie loves Done Elvire and makes, in effect, one demand on her: that she verbalize her sentiments. She tells him that other signs should convey the message:

> "Sans employer la langue,/
> il est des interprètes
> Qui parlent clairement des/
> atteintes secrètes.

Un soupir, un regard, une
 simple rougeur,
Un silence est assez/
 pour expliquer un coeur.
Tout parle dans l'amour..."
(I, i, 67-71)

Here, she seems to speak from a position of 'ressemblance': a whole system of signs can convey truth. Dom Garcie, however, demands a verbal representation: the other signs are less clear to him than Done Elvire seems to believe.

There follow several scenes of Dom Garcie's jealousy; the first is mild and quickly subdued, but each ensuing scene of jealousy is more violent than the preceding one. At the play's beginning, Dom Garcie is lucid; language and reason coincide. Then, as the play progresses, language and anger coincide, and eventually his jealousy leads him to incoherence:

"C'en est fait...le destin.../
 Je ne saurais parler" (1234).

"J'ai vu....vengeance! ô ciel" (1236).

And, once Done Elvire agrees to marry him, his words are insufficient to express his joy:

"Ciel! dans l'excès des biens/
 que cet aveu m'octroie,
Rends capable mon coeur/
 de supporter sa joie"(1872-1873)!

Throughout the play, Done Elvire refuses to declare her love directly. It has been suggested that she and Dom Garcie come together through the help of Nature;[7] that they are incompatible in any

but sexual matters. However, since Nature is not mentioned or noticeable in the play, it seems more plausible to suggest that Done Elvire accepts Dom Garcie because he is more valuable to her alive than dead (he would kill himself if she refused him). That is, she has complete control over him. She has yet to give him what he obviously desires most; verbal evidence of her love. She can always hold back this final prize, this act of naming her emotion, in exchange for whatever she can exact from her husband.

Dom Garcie demands that Done Elvire equate word and sentiment; this she refuses to do. He seeks to expurgate his jealous despair through heroic action, only to learn that his supposed rival has already performed that act. He desires to kill himself; this is foiled by Done Elvire. Dom Garcie's attacks of jealousy grow more intense after each episode until he becomes incoherent; language will not suffice to express his despair. This incoherence is complemented by Elvire's silence; only when she agrees to begin the game anew does Dom Garcie return to a state of provisional happiness.

The aspects of representative language seen in this play include lucidity, incoherence (of despair and of joy), silence (or the use of non-language as representation), and language as a means of power. Elvire, like Célimène in Le Misanthrope, also

uses language as a game: it expresses whatever she needs expressed at the moment.* And when Dom Garcie attempts to validate his words through his acts, the acts are foiled by exterior causes. Language may represent well or poorly: what is important is its capacity for representation and the multiple dramatic forms this may take.

L'Ecole des maris presents and contrasts two more forms of language, social and mechanical. Ariste tells his younger brother Sganarelle:

> "Toujours au plus grand nombre
> on doit s'accommoder
> Et jamais il ne faut se faire
> regarder.
> L'un et l'autre excès choque,
> et tout homme bien sage
> Doit faire des habits ainsi que
> du langage,
> N'y rien trop affecter, et, sans
> empressement,
> Suivre ce que l'usage y fait de
> changement" (I, i; 41-46).

Ariste's standard of behavior is conformity to society, whereas Sganarelle equates his personal desires with what should be. He cannot utilize social language as the other characters do. He tells Léonor:

> "Mon Dieu! madame, sans langage,
> Je ne vous parle pas, car vous
> êtes trop sage" (I, ii; 131-132).

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*See Hubert (op. cit., pp. 30-47) for further discussion of Elvire and her 'word diet'. Dom Garcie and Alceste have often been compared; a similar comparison seems valid for Célimène and Done Elvire, at least up to a point.

When Valère attempts to converse with him, Sganarelle uses the minimum number of words necessary to answer without saying anything (Cela se peut; Soit; Je le crois; etc.). Ergaste, commenting on Sganarelle's behavior, says: "Il a le repart brusque, et l'accueil loup-garou" (I, iv; 310). The social use of language is foreign to Sganarelle, as are all other accepted standards of social behavior.

The one form of language he has mastered is the mechanical one; he is able to repeat verbatim what he has been told,[8] provided that he can gain by doing so. Isabelle tells him that Valère has been bothering her; Sganarelle repeats her exact words to Valère (II, ii; II, viii). Since the words refer to a non-existent event, Valère receives the message Isabelle wished to convey, that of her interest in him. Sganarelle is unaware of this and so becomes a go-between against himself and for the two young people. When Isabelle confronts Valère in Sganarelle's presence (II, ix), she continues the same deception. Sganarelle thinks he is being praised and Valère scolded, whereas the opposite is true. Language is used to assert the opposite of what it says, unknowingly so by Sganarelle and deliberately so by Isabelle.

Sganarelle does not function well in a verbal exchange based on current social standards;

it is the mechanical use of language (memorization, repetition, recitation), based on his own standards, that he employs best. Expectedly, it is when Isabelle appears to react mechanically and to use Sganarelle's principles in a given situation, that he thinks most highly of her.

Sganarelle's mechanical language is evidently comic, as are all other manifestations of his character. However, what is more important is that Ariste, Molière's first raisonneur[9] and evidently the spokesman for society and the spectators,[10] is also a comic character. He is a sixty-year-old who dresses and acts like a twenty-year-old; this discrepancy between age and conduct, evident throughout the play and mentioned several times by Sganarelle, would have been quite comic in Molière's time.[11]

Furthermore, Ariste's actions contradict his expressed philosophy. In theory, his 'school' is based upon freedom of movement; Léonor goes where and with whom she pleases; she supposedly has freedom of choice in that she can marry Ariste with his wealth and tolerance or choose someone else. In the final act, Ariste is led to believe that Léonor is marrying Valère. He reacts accordingly:

> "L'apparence qu'ainsi, sans
> m'en faire avertir,
> A cet engagement elle eût pu
> consentir!

> Moi, qui dans toute chose ai,
> depuis son enfance,
> Montré toujours pour elle entière complaisance,
> Et qui cent fois ai fait des protestations
> De ne jamais gêner ses inclinations" (III, vi; 981-986)?

The freedom of action he grants her is limited by the necessity of her verbalizing her actions. As such, it does not imply freedom of speech or freedom to be silent. For one moment, the weakness in his method is shown. His embarassment is short lived, however, as Léonor appears and agrees to marry him immediately. Although the comic potential in their coming marriage is not exploited, it is as obvious as a farce; the old, tolerant husband and the young, flirtatious wife are immediately definable as a comic couple. Sganarelle has learned enough from L'Ecole des Maris to give up women; Ariste has learned nothing.

For Molière to present society's spokesman as a comic character seems to imply that contemporary society, in its normal manifestations, is a potential comic object. It is obvious enough that mechanical language is comic; Molière is a bit more subtle in suggesting the comic possibilities of his public's language.

Up to this point, Molière seems to have explored the possibilities of representative lan-

guage in his theatre. He has presented language as action, contrasted it with other forms of dramatic action, studied its relationship to visual signs and the system of 'ressemblance', experimented with its multiple forms, and discovered the comic potential in various forms of social language. It is in Les Fâcheux that he isolates language, presenting it as the chief dramatic action. He thus accomplishes what the preceding plays were tending towards: the definitive transition from 'ressemblance' to 'représentation'.

Les Fâcheux consists of a series of primarily verbal portraits. Eraste is trying to see Orphise, but at every step he encounters a 'fâcheux'. The physical presence of each 'fâcheux' is accompanied by his words and actions; after he leaves, Eraste expresses a verbal opinion of him. The representation of the 'fâcheux' is accomplished through their physical presence and their words and actions. Unlike farce characters, they are not definable as ridiculous the moment they appear; instead, they must speak before one realizes in what way they are ridiculous. They represent themselves verbally more so than visually. And, after their departure, Eraste completes the verbal portrait. The action of the play thus remains primarily verbal; language is isolated as the principal means of dramatic action.

Besides the ascendancy of representative language, this play also suggests two esthetic elements that will take on greater importance in relationship to this work. The play was composed for the King, Louis XIV (even with his assistance) and places on stage several types whom the King considers ridiculous. In this way, the play illustrates what is comic. If the King laughs at a certain character or scene, that character or scene is ridiculous. That is, social behavior which does not conform to the ideal of social behavior (personified by the King) is comic. There exists then an ultimate authority for determining what is valid in comedy. The fact that this comic standard appears in a play structured on the use of language as action should suggest the importance of representative language in comic theory.

The second important element suggested is summarized in Eraste's refrain, "toujours des fâcheux." Each 'fâcheux' is a potential comic subject; the endlessness of comic subjects is thus indicated as it will be in L'Impromptu de Versailles. This is directly related to the potential infinity of representative language, as it is language that defines these comic types. Again, we will have occasion to to see this concept elaborated.

Once language has reached this important

plateau in Les Fâcheux, it is to be expected that Molière would attempt to exploit its potential even further. This he does in L'Ecole des Femmes, a play that merits an extensive study here as in almost any work on Molière.[12]

In L'Ecole des Maris, Sganarelle had learned a lesson: not to trust women. What Agnès learns in L'Ecole des Femmes is indeed more complex albeit more elementary: she learns how to speak. That is, she learns how to control and utilize language for her own purposes.

As Agnès is first described to us, her use of language is confined to the most limited forms of expression. She knows how to pray and express basic concepts; as Arnolphe sees her, this is the desired limit of her verbal ability; this is what he tells Chrysale:

> "Je prétends que la mienne /Agnès/,
> en clartés peu sublime,
> Même ne sache pas ce que c'est
> qu'unerime;
> Et, s'il faut qu'avec elle on
> joue au corbillon
> Et qu'on vienne à lui dire à
> son tour: Qu'y met-on?
> Je veux qu'elle réponde: Une
> tarte à la crème;
> En un mot, qu'elle soit d'une
> ignorance extrême;
> Et c'est assez pour elle, à
> vous en bien parler,
> De savoir prier Dieu, m'aimer,
> coudre, et filer" (I, i; 95-102)

She is to know nothing about 'rime',

that is, about poetry, about the more highly developed forms of verbal expression. Her language is not to conform to that necessary for games or for any other social activity. Arnolphe's desire that she immediately respond "une tarte à la crème" to the query "Qu'y met-on?" indicates a pedagogical approach to the problem of what Agnès should say. He would have her respond automatically to a given verbal stimulus, regardless of context. She need only know how to pray (another automatic use of language) and say what is necessary to express love for Arnolphe; he, undoubtedly, will instruct her in this matter. Besides that, her language is (or is to be) limited to the expression of whatever is necessary to assure the functioning of her very basic chores.

The above description given by Arnolphe is indicative of how he would have her appear; indeed, it is probably more than she can do at present. However, the same scene has Arnolphe recounting another anecdote about Agnès:

> "elle était fort en peine, et
> me vint demander,
> Avec une innocence à nulle autre
> pareille,
> Si les enfants qu'on fait se faisaient par l'oreille" (162-164).

What she says does not yet conform to fact, but she is moving toward the union of word and object. She is doing so in the most obvious manner, by the interrogative use of language. The fact that her source

for this information is Arnolphe explains his joy in being able to control the answers given. She wants her words to represent what is; he defines what is. Although the situation appears to be what Arnolphe desires, it is evidently a delicate one; he has to have all the answers. He probably believes he has, but the situation still remains an open one.

Agnès' first appearance, a very short one, seems to verify what Arnolphe has said about her. She expresses pleasure at seeing him (I, iii; 233); complains only of the fleas having bothered her (236); misunderstands Arnolphe when he says she will soon have someone to keep them away from her at night (238); then tells him what she is sewing (239-240). Her language is as simple as Arnolphe had led us to believe; it contains no social niceties; it will not accept a double-entendre. It seems to correspond perfectly to Agnès' limited existence and experience.

Agnès first speaks at length in her walk with Arnolphe (II, v). Her conversation is quite a remarkable one. In her first few utterances she conforms to Arnolphe's earlier description, answering automatically:

> Arnolphe: Qu'avez-vous fait encore
> ces neuf ou dix jours-ci?
> Agnès: Six chemises, je pense, et
> six coiffes aussi (465-466).

However, when she is asked to tell of her encounter

with Horace, she must abandon the automatic, stimulus-response type of verbal expression. She must describe what has happened; she must use language to represent a past action. Indeed, she describes what happened simply enough, but in a fashion far from dull:

"J'étais sur le balcon à travailler au frais,
Lorsque je vis passer sous les arbres d'auprès
Un jeune homme bien fait, qui, rencontrant ma vue,
D'une humble révérence aussitôt me salue:
Moi, pour ne point manquer à la civilité,
Je fis la révérence aussi de mon côté.
Soudain il me refait une autre révérence;
Moi, j'en refais de même une autre en diligence;
Et lui d'une troisième aussitôt repartant,
D'une troisième aussi j'y repars à l'instant.
Il passe, vient, repasse, et toujours, de plus belle,
Me fait à chaque fois révérence nouvelle;
Et moi, qui tous ces tours fixement regardais,
Nouvelle révérence aussi je lui rendais:
Tant que, si sur ce point la nuit ne fût venue,
Toujours comme cela je me serais tenue,
Ne voulant point céder, et recevoir l'ennui
Qu'il me pût estimer moins civile que lui (485-502)
.....
Le lendemain, étant sur notre porte,
Une vieille m'aborde, en parlant de la sorte:
"Mon enfant, le bon Dieu puisse-t-il vous bénir,
Et dans tous vos attraits longtemps vous maintenir!

Il ne vous a pas fait une belle
personne
Afin de mal user des choses qu'il
vous donne;
Et vous devez savoir que vous avez
blessé
Un coeur qui de s'en plaindre est
aujourd'hui forcé." (503-510)
.....
"Moi, j'ai blessé quelqu'un, fis-
je tout étonnée.
- Oui, dit-elle, blessé, mais bles-
sé tout de bon;
Et c'est l'homme qu'hier vous vîtes
du balcon.
- Hélas!..qui pourrait, dis-je, en
avoir été cause?
Sur lui, sans y penser, fis-je
choir quelque chose?
- Non, dit-elle, vos yeux ont fait
ce coup fatal;
Et c'est de leurs regards qu'est
venu tout son mal.
Hé! mon Dieu! ma surprise est,
fis-je, sans seconde;
Mes yeux ont-ils du mal, pour en
donner au monde?
- Oui, fit-elle, vos yeux, pour
causer le trépas,
Ma fille, ont un venin que vous
ne savez pas.
En un mot, il languit, le pauvre
misérable;
Et, s'il faut, poursuivit la
vieille charitable,
Que votre cruauté lui refuse un
secours,
C'est un homme à porter en terre
dans deux jours.
- Mon Dieu! j'en aurais, dis'je, une
douleur bien grande.
Mais pour le secourir qu'est-ce qu'il
me demande?
- Mon enfant, me dit-elle, il ne veut
obtenir
Que le bien de vous voir et de vous
entretenir;
Vos yeux peuvent eux seuls empêcher
sa ruine,
Et du mal qu'ils ont fait être la
médecine.
- Hélas! volontiers, dis-je; et,
puisqu'il est ainsi,

> Il peut, tant qu'il voudra, me
> venir voir ici" (512-534).
> .....
> Voilà comme il me vit, et reçut
> guérison.
> Vous-même, à votre avis, n'ai-je
> pas eu raison?
> Et pouvais-je, après tout, avoir
> la conscience
> De le laisser mourir faute d'une
> assistance?
> Moi qui compatis tant aux gens
> qu'on fait souffrir
> Et ne puis, sans pleurer, voir
> un poulet mourir" (537-542).

It is evident that Agnès' story has room for many non-verbal gestures (the actress who first interpreted the role, Mlle de Brie, was quite good at these), as indicated by the number of curtsies exchanged between herself and Horace; by the lively dialogue with the 'entremetteuse'; and by the number of questions and exclamations inserted by Agnès in her account. She uses language and movement to represent, and this type of representation seems to indicate an attempt at using a language far less simple than that to which she is accustomed. Her language expresses her personality as well as representing an event; it is lyrical and lively as well as communicative. It is, in fact, becoming an esthetic expression rather than a direct, automatic reaction. She may not know what poetry is, but her language is moving towards an esthetic dimension beyond that of Arnolphe's concept of 'rime'.

In fact, she tells us her philosophy of

life, if it may be called that. Arnolphe tells her that her conduct with Horace is sinful; she answers: "Un péché, dites-vous? Et la raison, de grâce?" She asks Arnolphe for verification, something he originally welcomed, but which now confounds him. The only answer he can produce is that "par ces actions le Ciel est courroucé." Agnès' response to this is quite remarkable:

> "Courroucé! Mais pourquoi faut-il
> qu'il s'en courrouce?
> C'est une chose, hélas! si plaisante et si douce.
> J'admire quelle joie on goûte à tout cela,
> Et je ne savais point encor ces choses-là" (603-606).

Not only is it remarkable, it is almost revolutionary. Agnès, as already seen, wants to learn, to know. And one of the first steps in learning is developing a satisfactory system of verbal expression and communication. Indeed, learning is Agnès' main concern; in fact, learning what she did not previously know is justification for any conduct. And what one finds pleasant and sweet, what one enjoys, is necessarily good; it could not possibly be contrary to the moral order of the universe. This scene seems to indicate Agnès' first disappointment with Arnolphe; he has failed to answer her question, to live up to the role of mentor, to provide the link between word and thing. Since

he is no longer useful in that respect, she must look elsewhere. For a second, she is exuberant, thinking that Arnolphe will have her married to Horace, but this disappears when she discovers that Arnolphe is talking about himself (611-629).

It is in her letter to Horace that she expresses her dilemma:

> "Je veux vous écrire, et je suis bien en peine par où je m'y prendrai. J'ai des pensées que je désirerais que vous sussiez; mais je ne sais comment faire pour vous les dire, et je me défie de mes paroles. Comme je commence à connaître qu'on m'a toujours tenue dans l'ignorance, j'ai peur de mettre quelque chose qui ne soit pas bien, et d'en dire plus que je ne devrais..... On me dit fort que tous les jeunes hommes sont des trompeurs, qu'il ne les faut point écouter, et que tout ce que vous me dites n'est que pour m'abuser; mais je vous assure que je n'ai pu encore me figurer cela de vous, et je suis si touchée de vos paroles, que je ne saurais croire qu'elles soient menteuses. Dites-moi franchement ce qui en est; car enfin, comme je suis sans malice, vous auriez le plus grand tort du monde si vous me trompiez; et je pense que j'en mourrais de déplaisir" (III, iv).

Her problem, then, is that her words do not represent her thoughts, that they may actually say other than what she means; that is, that language may be ambiguous. But she wants to learn,

to know; and it is only through language, now that of Horace, that she is able to do so. It is because she is "touchée de /ses/ paroles" that she believes them to be true; what provides pleasure must be good, and so true. The greatest obstacle in her path is the problem of language; once she has overcome it, the rest will be easy.

And she does overcome it, for in her final dialogue with Arnolphe, she shows a complete mastery of language. She says what is true, which is what Arnolphe had admired in her, but it is no longer naïveté that results from this union of word and sentiment. She tells Arnolphe that she loves Horace; he answers, "Et vous avez le front de le dire à moi-même!" She counters, "Et pourquoi, s'il est vrai, ne le dirais-je pas" (V, iv; 1520-1522). She uses language as a weapon to cower Arnolphe. Every word she utters beats him down a little more. When he tells her,

> "Vous fuyez l'ignorance, et
> voulez, quoi qu'il coûte, ap-
> prendre du blondin quelque
> chose" (1560-1561),

she answers,

> "Sans doute. C'est de lui que
> je sais ce que je puis savoir:
> Et beaucoup plus qu'à vous je
> pense lui devoir" (1561-1563)

She next says she would love Arnolphe if it were in her power to do so (1584-1585), a moot

proposition and possibly a use of language as dissimulation. After Arnolphe's grotesque declaration of his love and abandonment of his principles (1586-1604), Agnès cuts him short and completes the kill:

> "Tenez, tous vos discours ne me
> touchent point l'âme;
> Horace avec deux mots en ferait
> plus que vous" (1605-1606).

She uses language, talking about language ('discours', mots') to silence Arnolphe. And he is reduced to silence; language has failed him; he must now resort to physical force to detain her. The pupil has overcome her mentor; she has learned the mastery of language whereas he has, in a sense, unlearned his.

Arnolphe, at the play's beginning, was an accomplished master of language. Chrysale tells us that Arnolphe is known everywhere for his verbal portraits of cuckolds (I, i; 15-20); Arnolphe obligingly sketches a few of these portraits (21-42), finishing with the following:

> "Enfin ce sont partout des sujets
> de satire;
> Et comme spectateur, ne puis-je pas
> en rire" (43-44)?

He is satirist and spectator; the combination is unusual in that Arnolphe 'laughs' by creating verbal representations of the comic subjects. It is through language that he laughs, certainly one of the most highly developed uses possible of the verbal medium. This verbal laughter must be shared;

it must be presented to others by the very fact that it is language and so communication. Arnolphe's language thus represents, communicates, and fulfils a moral and esthetic function (the artistic exposure of cuckolds), as well as fulfilling a personal need for expression which might otherwise be satisfied by laughter.

Arnolphe's use of language does not stop there; he goes so far as to change his name to Monsieur de la Souche. Besides showing his bourgeois vanity, making possible Horace's mistake and so the play's action, and providing a comic note by itself,[13] this name change also coincides with Arnolphe's highly civilized mastery of language. If one has mastered the social and esthetic functions of language, why not go beyond the confines of the given structure of language and rename objects already possessing names? The representation of a certain object by a certain word is obviously a prerequisite for any effective use of language; to rename objects is to change the structure of language at its base and therefore to make an indelible mark on the linguistic phenomenon itself. If the name 'de la Souche' indicates that Arnolphe sees himself as the first of his lineage*, as another Adam, then the act of naming

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*Hubert, op. cit., p. 72, note 7.

is another manifestation of this analogy with Adam. However, whereas Adam had his name given to him before being permitted to name the other creatures, Arnolphe begins by renaming himself - an action which identifies him with God as well as with the first man.[14]

It is precisely with the name change that Arnolphe's fortunes begin to descend. With Horace, he must use language as dissimulation; Horace must not discover that he is M. de la Souche, while Agnès must know him only by that name. Indeed, a strange tension is created between Arnolphe and M. de la Souche. By re-naming himself, Arnolphe has created another verbal representation of himself. But it is far from the desired representation, as he discovers from Horace: M. de la Souche is 'ridicule', 'fou', 'jaloux à faire rire', and 'sot' (I, iv). Arnolphe, of course, is unable to defend de la Souche's reputation and, since Horace considers Arnolphe his friend, Arnolphe is forced to assume a different attitude when he is Arnolphe and when he is de la Souche. The two names have produced two objects, occupying the same space.

It is with the realization that he loves Agnès that Arnolphe exhibits another use of language; it becomes the vehicle for the direct ex-

pression of his sentiments, first to himself (III, v: "Et cependant je l'aime, après ce lâche tour,/Jusqu'à ne me pouvoir passer de cet amour" [998-999.), then to Agnès (Considère par là l'amour que j'ai pour toi,/ Et, me voyant si bon, en revanche aime-moi [V, iv; 1582-1583]). It is true that his declaration of love is grotesque and ridiculous; it is nonetheless a direct expression of sentiment: language and feeling coincide; language, at this point, represents what the speaker wants it to. However, the speech situation depends on the listener as well as the speaker; when Agnès rebukes him, Arnolphe's words represent anger (another direct expression of feeling) and then vengeance against Horace (V, vii). When Arnolphe is finally beaten, he leaves the stage "tout transporté et ne pouvant parler", except for a final 'Ouf!'

From a position of a highly civilized control of language, Arnolphe has regressed to a state of incoherence, in which his verbal facility has been reduced to what could only be compared to the 'cri de nature', the most primitive form of language in classical language theory.[15] In descending to this level, Arnolphe has used language as dissimulation, then as direct expression of feeling (love, frustration, anger). The descent is quite regular and brings him to a point far

below the original state of Agnès. The master of language has become the victim of incoherence; Agnès, the verbal cripple, has learned to use language to crush her tormentor.

L'Ecole des Femmes seems then to present the problem of language on a grand scale. Language begins, evolves, and reaches a point of civilized perfection. It may also regress from that position to the basic cry of nature, or primitive incoherence. Between the primitive and civilized manifestations of language is a variety of possibilities: communication, dissimulation, esthetic speech, and representation of various sentiments and thoughts.

What Molière seems to have accomplished in L'Ecole des Femmes is a representation of language by itself: dramatic language represents the vast variety and possibility of representative language. However, this representation of language by itself produces ambiguity, therefore different interpretations by different spectators, and finally the celebrated Querelle.

La Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes is a dramatized conversation; as such, it emphasizes the importance of language. And the principal criticisms offered by the play's detractors deal primarily with its use of language, such as 'obscénités', anti-feminist slurs, and the like. The play's most

sophisticated detractor, Lysidas, objects to the too frequent use of words instead of action:

> "....dans cette comédie-là,
> il ne se passe point d'actions,
> et tout consiste en des récits
> que vient faire ou Agnès ou
> Horace" (sc. vi).

Dorante, the play's defender, replies that "les récits eux-mêmes y sont des actions." This defense of language as dramatic action is seconded by Uranie:

> "Pour moi, je trouve que la
> beauté de L'Ecoles des femmes
> consiste dans cette confidence
> perpétuelle."

She perceives an esthetic unity in the play based on the characters' use of 'récits' which create a 'confidence perpétuelle', a primarily verbal unity.

In order to defend the play, Dorante interprets the objectionable words and passages as necessary to psychological versimilitude, demonstrating Agnès' naïveté or Arnolphe's jealousy. It is evident that, to Dorante, the play is capable of one clear, unambiguous interpretation, and that those who do not realize this are necessarily muddled. He defends the opinions of both the Court and the 'parterre' (who liked the play), leaving the detractors in a sort of netherworld composed of pedants, prudes and fools (represented, of course, by his opponents in the Critique.)

By defending language as dramatic action, and therefore as representation, Molière joins the critical and epistomological currents of his day. His expressed ideas on the ambiguity of interpretation will have changed by the time he presents the definitive Tartuffe; in the interim, he will have studied language in another direction in La Princesse d'Elide.

Euryale has fallen in love with the Princesse d'Elide not from having seen her, but from what he has heard about her. He had seen her once while passing through Elide, but this first encounter had failed to win his heart:

> "....ce passage offrit la
> princesse à mes yeux;
> Je vis tous les appas dont
> elle est revêtue,
> Mais de l'oeil dont on voit
> une belle statue:
> Leur brillante jeunesse ob-
> servée à loisir
> Ne porta dans mon âme aucun
> secret désir" (I, i; 60-64).

He sees her as a statue, as a beautiful object with which love is impossible. Paradoxically, it is when he discovers, through her reputation, that her personality is similar to that of a statue (in that she is incapable of love), that he falls in love with her.

> "Ce que n'avait point fait
> sa vue et sa beauté,
> Le bruit de ses fiertés en
> mon âme fit naître

> Un transport inconnu dont je
> ne fus point maître;
> Ce dédain si fameux eut des
> charmes secrets
> A me faire avec soin rappeler
> tous ses traits;
> Et mon esprit, jetant de nou-
> veaux yeux sur elle,
> M'em refit une image et si
> noble et si belle,
> Me peignit tant de gloires et
> de telles douceurs
> A pouvoir triompher de toutes
> ses froideurs,
> Que mon coeur, aux brillants
> d'une telle victoire,
> Vit de sa liberté s'évanouir
> la gloire" (I, i; 76-86).

He has fallen in love with a myth created by language. He transfers the myth to the object to make love possible. However, the problem remains: how can he win her love if she is incapable of love? He resolves on a unique tactic: he gives himself the same type of reputation that the princess enjoys. He, too, is inaccesible to the charms of love. He thus creates a myth of himself; the confrontation of two myths is a more equal one than that of a man against a myth. He tells her:

> "Comme j'ai fait profession
> toute ma vie de ne rien aimer,
> tous les soins que je prends ne
> vont point où tendent les
> autres. Je n'ai aucune pré-
> tention sur votre coeur, et le
> seul honneur de la course est
> tout l'avantage où j'aspire."
> (II, iv)

This attitude focuses the princess' attention on him and leads to the ultimate union of the two. He has made of himself a male counterpart to her. As Moron observes (I, ii; III, iii), both

'myths' are in love with themselves. The princess falls in love with this image of herself, then learns that Euryale is not what he has claimed to be (that he does love her). She cannot give a ready answer to his declaration of love; she is totally confused when she learns the truth of his feelings:

> "Seigneur, je ne sais pas encore ce que je veux. Donnez-moi le temps d'y songer, je vous prie, et m'épargnez un peu la confusion où je suis" (V, ii).

It is assumed that she will marry Euryale, but that is not the psychological import of the dénouement. What is important is that she has expressed a certain degree of 'sensibilité'. The final dance celebrates, not the love of the princess and Euryale, but "le changement du coeur de la princesse." The myth has been humanized, and this is cause enough for celebration.

She has been humanized, but by falling out of love. As long as she saw Euryale as the reflection of herself, she could love him (or love herself through him). Once she sees that he is not that reflection, she can no longer love him. The ensuing confusion comes from her witnessing the destruction of her own image. It is the realization of her fallibility that creates her confusion and her 'changement du coeur.'

This play would seem to suggest that the success of a myth depends on an affinity between mythical language and mythical object a system of 'ressemblances', which is at first valid for the princess. Euryale, however, represents himself as a myth; he uses representative language where she conforms to 'ressemblance'. The clash of the two leads to the dissolution of both myths. This is relatively inconsequential to 'représentation', but traumatic to 'ressemblance'.

The relationship of language and myth is continued in Tartuffe. In a sense, this play is used to strengthen an existing myth, that of the infallibility of royal authority mentioned at the play's end. In another sense, the play attempts to demonstrate the possibility of an unambiguous interpretation. It was mentioned earlier that the preface to Tartuffe demonstrates Molière's concern with the problem of linguistic ambiguity; it is for this reason that he uses "tout l'art et tous les soins" possible to point out the hypocrite's true character.

The first two acts of the play are devoted to defining Tartuffe. An image of Tartuffe is projected to the spectators so that, when he finally appears, there is no doubt that he is a lecherous hypocrite. He has been defined as such by rational,

sensible people. He is defended only by Orgon and Mme Pernelle, both of whom are too ridiculous to be taken seriously. In two acts, a 'Tartuffe-myth' is created. When he does appear, there is no way in which he could belie the myth. He is the victim of a conspiracy manipulated by Molière, the other characters, and, at the play's end, by the King himself, the ultimate authority.

Much of Tartuffe's power comes from his own manipulation of language; Orgon and Mme Pernelle equate his words with divine truth, and Elmire is embarassingly unable to contradict his casuistry. Even Cléante, supposedly the most reasonable character in the play, does not fare too well in verbal competition with Tartuffe. Cléante demands that Tartuffe leave the household; Tartuffe gives religious reasons for not doing so; instead of contradicting those reasons, Cléante continues to repeat the same demands until Tartuffe, probably bored more than intimidated, excuses himself for a 'devoir pieux' (IV, i). Indeed, Tartuffe's command of language is so efficient that it is only when Orgon sees him trying to seduce his spouse that he realizes he has been duped.

Tartuffe is defined verbally so extensively that a Tartuffe-myth is created; much of his power depends upon his skillful use of language; at

the play's end, he is thrown into silence by the words of the exempt, the King's official voice. The power of language is thus emphasized throughout the play.

The fact that the first two acts are devoted to defining Tartuffe indicates that Molière's intent was to establish an affinity between the name and the personnage. That is, he is trying to return to 'ressemblance' in order to avoid the ambiguities of 'représentation', which must have accounted in large part for his troubles with the first two versions of Tartuffe. The unmasking of Tartuffe by the voice of royal authority verifies the myth and the affinity between word and object.

The play, however, is not a voluntary return to 'ressemblance'; as already noted, Molière rejects 'ressemblance' in the preface to Tartuffe. And Tartuffe, having been defined, should logically be a 'type' in every conceivable way. However, his use of language is not in terms of 'ressemblance'. He uses language according to the situation in which he finds himself: if necessary, he will tell Orgon the truth about himself (III, vi), knowing that Orgon will misinterpret it; he uses casuistry whenever necessary and, of course, pious terms whenever they seem to be called for. He uses language to represent whatever he wants represented at the moment; in this way, his language is a mani-

festation of his personal liberty, a series of existential acts that are silenced only by the voice of ultimate authority. He thus resembles Dom Juan, who will retain his freedom of representation until death. Tartuffe thereby creates a tension between 'ressemblance' and 'représentation', a tension between the myth of Tartuffe and the man himself.

If this interpretation is correct, then it can easily be seen that Tartuffe is, in a sense, Molière's representative. The actor is also a hypocrite; his profession demands that he appear, on stage at least, to be what he is not.* Like Tartuffe, Molière must use language to exert an influence on others. Again like Tartuffe, Molière's freedom of representation is limited by certain authorities. And, as Molière tells us in his preface, there are those who associate the word 'comédie' with debauchery; they thus define Molière in terms of 'ressemblance' as Tartuffe is defined in the play.

Dom Juan also begins with the definition of a myth. In fact, Dom Juan is defined thrice: first by Sganarelle (I, i), who sees his master as a base creature of instinct, an oversexed atheist who copulates with any available woman; next, Dom

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*Incidentally, the word 'hypocrite' derives from a Greek word meaning 'actor'.

Juan defines himself as a lover of beauty and particularly of the charms of first love, thus accounting for his constant change of partners (I, ii); finally, he tells us of a young couple he has just seen and reveals that his love of the woman came about through jealousy of their mutual happiness (I, ii). Two interpretations of the Dom Juan myth are thus suggested, as well as one possible motive for his acts; the remainder of the play does not appear to validate any one, so that the ambiguity of interpretation remains.

As previously mentioned, Dom Juan, like Tartuffe, uses language as a representation of his personal liberty. This, indeed, could well be an effect of the ambiguity of representative language: if language is ambiguous, its function as valid communication is suspect; however, its function as freedom remains valid.

Dom Juan, then, succeeds where Tartuffe fails; he represents himself as freedom until the end. He too is defeated, but by such an artificial device that the validity of his freedom remains. One of the letters defending the play points out that "il est de l'essence de la pièce que le foudre écrase quelqu'un";[16] Dom Juan, of course, is the most likely 'quelqu'un'.

What Molière accomplishes in Dom Juan,

it seems to me, is to create a myth using representative language. In doing so, he utilizes the ambiguity of representative language to suggest the ambiguity of myth. If a myth is understood in terms of 'ressemblance', it must have an affinity with a higher truth. If it is interpreted in terms of 're-présentation', it is no more than a necessarily ambiguous attempt to represent the undefinable. And Dom Juan is undefinable: his manifestation of personal liberty prevents him from being categorized.

In the personnage of Sganarelle, Dom Juan also ridicules the myths of contemporary society. Rochemont, the play's most virulent enemy, saw quite clearly and correctly that Sganarelle was the sole defender of accepted social values.[17] More recently, it has been demonstrated that Sganarelle is a caricature of the raisonneur and therefore a device to satirize the spectators' values.[18]

By returning to representative language and emphasizing its ambiguity, Molière has provided a dramatic refutation of the 'ressemblance' imposed upon Tartuffe. He has also avenged himself upon the censors of Tartuffe and, by suggesting a novel dramatic approach to the representation of myth, he has opened new possibilities for future work on that subject. Most importantly perhaps is that he has insisted upon the validity of his

own freedom of expression.

In L'Amour Médecin, Molière appears to exploit the satirical possibilities of representative language, with medicine as the target. Medicine itself is called a 'pompeux galimatias', a form of verbal nonsense that represents nothing. It is in Le Misanthrope, as was seen earlier, that Molière returns to the relationship between 'ressemblance' and 'représentation'.

Alceste becomes a representation of 'ressemblance'; the others remain representations of complacency, coquettishness, hypocrisy and sincerity. These multiple aspects of representation would seem to help in understanding the play's expressed purpose, to "parler contre les moeurs de ce siècle." It is a representation of and against the age of representation. As such, it may be the highest point in Molière's use of language as representation.

The possibility of myth returns in the character of Myrtil in Mélicerte, but is left unfinished with the play. Myrtil loves Mélicerte, but his supposed father, Lycarsis, objects to their union, preferring that Myrtil choose between Daphné and Eroxène. Myrtil speaks to Lycarsis and, by a skillful use of words, convinces him to permit the marriage of Myrtil and Mélicerte. However, another

complication arises: Nicandre arrives to announce that the King has chosen Mélicerte as his bride. At this point, the play ends.

In the play, language is condensed into a coming 'aveu', an anticipated declaration by someone of something. At the end of Act I, we wait for Myrtil's 'aveu' as to his choice of a bride; at the end of Act II, we wait for further explanations by Nicandre as well as for Mélicerte's declaration. This anticipation seems to unite dramatic language with dramatic time; both move toward the future.[19] This movement towards the future is emphasized by the incompleteness of the play; by remaining without an end, it projects language and time towards infinity. In this way, its incompleteness becomes a valid structural element. In Le Sicilien, the use of incipient verse seems to be an attempt to unite poetry and prose in order to develop a new dimension of dramatic language. It studies the relationship between what is seen, what is said, and what is done in what appears to be primarily an esthetic experiment. In Amphitryon, Molière returns to the treatment of myth.

In dedicating this play to the Grand Condé, Molière writes: "Le nom du GRAND CONDE est un nom trop glorieux pour le traiter comme on fait tous les autres noms." This emphasis on the rela-

tionship of name and person signals the identical theme in the play, just as it suggests two levels of language.

The two levels of language are brought out in the prologue. In his talk with the goddess La Nuit, Mercure is told: "Il est de certains mots dont l'usage rabaisse/Cette sublime qualité /of divinity/,/Et que, pour leur indignité,/Il est bon qu'aux hommes on laisse" (v. 15-19). The gods speak in one manner, men in another. In the same prologue, Mercure speaks of the relativity of the word/object situation: "....suivant ce qu'on peut être,/Les choses changent de nom" (130-131). These two important themes reflect both a philosophical view of language (in the word/object relationship) and a comic possibility of language (the differentiation of two levels of language, one sublime and one 'indigne').

A third possibility of language is suggested by Sosie in his first encounter with Mercure. He is asked: "Quel est ton sort, dis-moi?" and answers: "D'être homme, et de parler" (309-310). There is a comic intent in Sosie's answer, yet the answer suggests more than comedy. It has been suggested that this scene is a dramatic rebuttal of Descartes' cogitio;[20] it is interesting that, for Descartes and his followers, it would be redundant

to say that one is a man and that one speaks; to be a man is to be capable of speech, and vice-versa.[21] In the development of this scene, however, Sosie is reduced to a state in which his very existence is put into question. By beating him, Mercure forces him to admit that he is not Sosie; by telling him of events that only Sosie himself could know, Mercure almost has him convinced that he is not Sosie. He is reduced to a state of superfluous existence, in which he knows he exists only by his conscienceness of himself. What he says about himself is no longer valid, as a stronger and smarter Sosie has replaced him. He had used language to identify and define himself; this use of language is now invalid. Sosie is divested of his historical identity and is aware only of his physical self and the necessity that he be <u>something</u>. (512). Once his verbal definition of his historical self is suspect, so must be all of his other verbal manifestations.

This superfluity of his own words seems to affect Sosie in his first encounter with Amphitryon (II, i). He tells his master:

> "Mais, de peur d'incongruité,
> Dites-moi, de grâce, à l'avance,
> De quel air il vous plaît que ceci
> soit traité.
> Parlerai-je, monsieur, selon ma
> conscience,
> Ou comme auprès des grands on le
> voit usité?

> Faut-il dire la vérité,
> Ou bien user de complaisance"?
> (706-712)

Since what he says has been proven to be invalid, he need say only that which will benefit him the most. If Amphitryon will beat him because of the 'truth', he can easily say something else that his master would prefer to hear. For Sosie, language has lost its validity as representation of experience; he will say whatever will keep him out of trouble.

When Amphitryon refuses to believe Sosie's story of a double, the valet's reaction is an aparte:

> "Tous les discours sont des sottises,
> Partant d'un homme sans éclat:
> Ce serait paroles exquises
> Si c'était un grand qui parlât".
> (839-842)

Again, the difference in levels of language is indicated, this time on the level of caste. As Sosie's words appear ridiculous to Amphitryon, so Amphitryon's appear ridiculous to the gods. From this point of view, there are at least two levels of comic language in the play: Sosie's in relationship to that of Amphitryon; Amphitryon's in relationship to that of the gods.

At the play's end, it is again Sosie who voices the problem:

> "Et l'on me des-Sosie enfin
> Comme on vous des-Amphitryonne."
> (1860-1861)

Sosie and Amphitryon have lost not only their names, but all that is related to the names: their identities before others. When word and object are separated, the object exists, paradoxically, as a nearly pure subjectivity: Sosie knows that he is something, but no one else seems to know it.

When Jupiter appears as himself, he tells Amphitryon:

> "Mon nom, qu'incessamment toute
> la terre adore,
> Etouffe ici les bruits qui pou-
> vaient éclater" (1896-1897).

Once Jupietr takes his valid name, Amphitryon automatically regains his. Word and object are reunited, as they were separated, by the will of the gods. When Jupiter justifies his love-making to Alcmène, Sosie realizes the ambiguity of the situation: "Le seigneur Jupiter sait dorer la pilule" (1913). Again, the different levels of language are indicated. What would be called adultery and dishonor in human terms becomes 'paroles exquises' in the mouth of a god. Indeed, it is at this point that the two different uses of language coincide. The union of word and object is, in the last analysis, determined by he who speaks on the most convincing level of language, that of authoritative rhetoric.

Sosie's last words, which close the play,

admonish all to silence:

> "Sur telles affaires, toujours
> Le meilleur est de ne rien dire."
> (1942-1943)

The representative aspect of language has been so put into doubt that, even though word and object have apparently been re-integrated, it would be unsatisfactory to attempt a verbal representation of the event. Mortals may be unable to "dorer la pilule" as well as Jupiter; the alternative is not to trust one's words and to remain silent.

The word/object situation is interrupted, then restored, by the gods, the highest authority over men. However, the gods' authority is not a necessary one, as Mercure suggests during the prologue:

> "Et je ne puis vouloir, dans
> mon destin fatal,
> Aux poètes assez de mal
> De leur impertinence extrême,
> D'avoir, par une injuste loi
> Dont on veut maintenir l'usage,
> A chaque dieu, dans son emploi,
> Donné quelque allure en partage,
> Et de me laisser à pied, moi,
> Comme un messager de village..."
> (24-32)

If the gods hold authority over men, it is because the poets have granted them the meams to this authority. This dependence of the gods upon poets suggests the key to an interpretation of the play in relationship to mythology. Poets are creators of myth; myths hold power over men. And men,

of course, produce poets. The character closest to a poet in this play is, strangely enough, Sosie. It is he who is concerned with the problem of language and who sees through the established mythology: Mercure is more of a devil than a god:

> "Le Ciel de m'approcher t'ôte
> à jamais l'envie:
> Ta fureur s'est par trop acharnée après moi
> Et je ne vis de ma vie
> Un dieu plus diable que toi."
> (1886-1889)

And Jupiter, as previously noted, justifies illicit conduct through the prerogatives of power. It is Sosie who realizes the superfluity of words and who is willing to alter them as necessary. This preoccupation with language marks Sosie as the potential poet, as well as actual buffoon, of the play.

Antoine Adam is of the opinion that Sosie speaks for Molière the tiring dramatist.* It is likewise possible that Sosie speaks for Molière the poet and farceur. As Sosie recognizes the contradictions apparent in the words and conduct of the gods, so Molière dramatizes the contingency of accepted mythology.

In George Dandin, mythology is put to rest. Dandin accepts the myth of nobility; the So-

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*Adam, op. cit., p. 366.

tenville couple demonstrates the invalidity of that myth. Dandin accepts the myth of marriage; Angélique soon convinces him of the folly of such an idea. Dandin accepts the myth of religion; he calls on Heaven to help him in his dilemma ("O Ciel, seconde mes desseins, et m'accorde la grâce de faire voir aux gens que l'on me déshonore" [II, viii]*), and soon discovers that he is dealing with an empty word, a meaningless myth. Devoid of the myths on which his existence is based, Dandin must seek annihilation.

In treating the relationship between language and myth, Molière seems to have realized that a myth, to be accepted, must rely on a system of 'ressemblances'. It must possess an affinity with some higher truth or absolute reality. As we have seen in Dom Juan, he reinterprets myth in terms of representative language and thus colors it with ambiguity, which first weakens and then destroys its validity. Once Molière becomes aware of the ambiguity of language, he applies it to mythology, thereby annihilating it.

L'Avare, as was mentioned earlier, dramatizes a possible escape from the ambiguities and (in Harpagon's case) the madness of representative

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*II, ix, in many editions.

language. By identifying himself with his 'cassette' and becoming a total object, Harpagon returns to 'ressemblance' on a non-verbal level. Monsieur de Pourceaugnac carries 'ressemblance' to its ultimate limits and, by suggesting that such a system may produce cruelty and victimage, demonstrates its invalidity.

Les Amants magnifiques displays a curious use of language. As this play is a little known one, a summary of the relevant action seems called for.

Sostrate loves the princess Eriphile; Clitidas discovers his infatuation, but promises not to tell the princess, for "le langage des yeux et des soupirs se fait entendre, mieux qu'à tout autre, à celle à qui il s'adresse." Sostrate agrees to let the princess devine the truth if she can, but warns Clitidas: "...gardons bien que par nulle autre voix elle en apprenne jamais rien." The language of the eyes, not of the voice, must dominate; Sostrate doubts that this will happen, as his announced intention is to "mourir sans déclarer ma passion." It is not the language of words that should attempt to convey his love, but the visual language of the eyes.

Clitidas, howveer, will not be content with letting visual signs do the work; he reveals to Eriphile that he has discovered Sostrate's secret (II, ii). She agrees with Sostrate that love

is not to be verbalized: "....c'est par son seul respect qu'il peut me plaîre; et, s'il était si hardi que de me déclarer son amour, il perdrait pour jamais et ma présence et mon estime."

The princess, however, breaks her own rule; she verbalizes her love to Sostrate, who replies in kind (IV, iv); language represents love (again, 'ressemblance', suggested by the language of the eyes, gives way to 'représentation'), but too late: by the machinations of the astrologer Anaxarque, Eriphile's mother, Aristione, believes that the gods want her to give her daughter to whoever saves her (Aristione's) life - and Anaxarque has arranged a false attack to permit another rival to do just that. Aristione has been convinced by visual signs (the apparition) of Venus) to act in a certain manner; the visual sign, however, loses its validity, as it is Sostrate who, by coincidence, saves Aristione from a wild boar. The conditions set forth by the gods (albeit falsified) have thus been met, so the dénouement satisfies all those who deserve satisfaction.

The interaction of language and visual signs, with language eventually dominating in its representative capacity, is of particular interest in this play, as it is predominantly a visual attraction. The King had specifically ordered "un

divertissement qui fût composé de tous ceux que le théâtre peut fournir." And, when the play was performed at the Comédie Française in 1954, it was primarily as a visual spectacle.

Indeed, the verbal aspect of the play would seem only incidental to the splendid scenery, elaborate machinery, magnificent costumes and dances of the total spectacle. The presentation of language as more valid than visual signs is almost a disharmony, a blatant contradiction, in such a setting. It may be more, however, than disharmony; it may well be a revolt by Molière the poet, an affirmation of the validity of verbal creation in the face of the evident supremacy of visual representation. The farceur ceases to be a farceur, and speaks as a poet - perhaps irrationally, yet with conviction. It would be the ultimate paradox if this, probably his least-commented play, should reveal one of his most important acts: a revolt against the mechanical and visual aspects of the theatre; a revolt that, in context, is patently absurd.

The title of Le Bourgeois gentilhomme indicates a socio-linguistic impossibility: a 'bourgeois' cannot be a 'gentilhomme'.[22] However, the effect of contradictions disappear when the ambiguity of language becomes dominant. And Jourdain is infatuated with the possibilities of language;

this is indicated early in the play when he calls his lackeys; when they appear and ask what he wants, he answers: "Rien. C'est pour voir si vous m'entendez bien" (I, ii). This interest in language is again emphasized in the phonetics lesson that he receives from his 'maître de philosophie' (II, iv); his eagerness to associate the word of a nobleman with his acts ("Il /Dorante/ m'a juré sa foi de gentilhomme"....."Je vous dis qu'il me tiendra parole, j'en suis sûr"/III, iii/.); and his admiration for the 'Turkish' language (IV, iv).

Indeed, what Jourdain wants most of all is to be called a nobleman, to be represented verbally as such. This is what Covielle does in relationship to Jourdain's father, redefining him as a 'gentilhomme' who happened to give clothing material to his friends for money (IV, iii):

> "Lui marchand! C'est pure dédisance, il ne l'a jamais été. Tout ce qu'il faisait, c'est qu'il était fort obligeant, fort officieux; et comme il se connaissait fort bien en étoffes, il en allait choisir de tous les côtés, les faisait apporter chez lui, et en donnait à ses amis pour de l'argent."

The same thing, of course, is done to Jourdain: the 'marchand' becomes a 'mamamouchi'. Jourdain thus poses a semantic structure to which the others eventually conform; this, of course, em-

phasizes the representativity of language and the means by which it is modifiable. In fact, Jourdain re-originates language according to contemporary theories of its origin:

> "Ceux qui devaient vivre dans un même pays et en société /Gassendi tells us/, ont dû, afin de se pouvoir signifier la même chose les uns aux autres, convenir de la voix qu'il proféreraient, retenant celle ou que le premier avait prononcée, ou qui semblait avoir plus de beauté et d'agrément, ou qui plaisait au plus grand nombre."[23]

To live in M. Jourdain's 'pays' and partake of his bounty, the others must adhere to the semantic structure that he had first offered; it is the most beautiful and pleasant to him, and eventually becomes that which pleases the greatest number. Jourdain has solved the problem of language by re-inventing language. He has constructed a system of verbal symbiosis from which all participants can profit.

The problem of language exists; how it is solved depends on who is faced with it. Molière illustrates this dramatically in Psyché, where his part consists of posing the problem of two verbal declarations (Psyché's declaration of her love and Amour's declaration of his identity), letting Corneille resolve it as he will.

At this point, it seems worthwhile to emphasize certain essential elements of this study that have been brought out so far. Representative language deals with the relationship between word and object, between language and that to which it refers. For purposes of simplification, let us use the terminology 'word' and 'thing' to study this relationship. We may now say that the structure of representative language consists of a given number of words that refer to a given number of things; this may be schematized thusly:

$$w.w_1.w_2.....w_n//t.t_1.t_2.....t_n$$

For language to represent adequately, it is necessary that w conform to t, w_1 to t_1, w_2/t_2, and so forth. Ambiguity occurs in such instances as w/t_1, w_2/t, etc. Now, up to this point, it seems that we have seen the following possibilities of this formula: w/t, or the unambiguous joining of word and object, such as that which Alceste attempts to realize, and which others, both comic and 'honnêtes', sometimes attain (Agnès, for example); $w/t,t_1,t_2$, or the use of the same word to refer to different objects, which Philinte accomplishes; $w,w_1,w_2/t_{xx}$, or the use of several words which may or may not coincide with a given object (Célimène); w/t_x, or the use of a word to represent what one is not (the various hypocrites); w/t be-

coming w_x/t, or the changing of a word without changing the object in question, as 'marchand' becoming 'mamamouchi' in reference to M. Jourdain; and finally w/t becoming t, or the substitution of an object for the word/object relationship, which is what Harpagon does. These appear to be the basic combinations used to this point; of course, they would be subject to various manipulations in reference to different characters and plays. There is one combination, however, that has not yet appeared; that is w/0 or w; a situation in which language represents nothing, or nothingness. It is in Les Fourberies de Scapin, I believe, that his antics suggest that Scapin attains this combination, with drastic consequences for representative language.

Scapin's most important 'fourberies' are three in number: first, he convinces Argante that Octave is not to blame in the matter of his marriage (I, iv). Next, he extorts money from Argante and Géronte (II, v; II, vi; II, vii). Finally, he beats Géronte in the sack (III, ii). Each of these acts is a momentary one based on the 'récit' of a non-factual event that could not conceivably stand the slightest scrutiny. He says that Octave's troubles come from his wife's family, but his wife has no family; he tells Géronte that

his son has been kidnapped for ransom, which is untrue; he tells Géronte to get in the sack to avoid being beaten by others, then beats him himself. Each 'fourberie' has a momentary purpose, although Scapin is supposedly working towards a goal of longer duration: the acceptance by the fathers of their sons' actions. Each act possesses an element of gratuitousness, of accomplishment for the sake of its accomplishment, as a manifestation of Scapin's personal genius. The third act is nearly a totally gratuitous one;[24] Scapin wants to avenge himself on Géronte because he was beaten by Léandre!

Besides the tricks dramatized in the play, Scapin confesses to previous misbehavior (II, iii). In the past, he has stolen Léandre's wine and Zerbinette's watch; also, disguised as a 'lopu-garou', he has beaten Léandre. In the play itself, he is presented as loyal to Léandre and Octave; however, he had apparently once seemed loyal to Argante and Géronte, as they believe his lies when they first hear them. Scapin thus seems to be capable of loyalty or disloyalty depending on the situation. He will serve whatever 'master' has a problem, even if it means betraying another 'master'. And he will serve himself, whenever possible, to whoever's bounty. In this sense, he is as gratuitous as his 'fourberies'.

If language is primarily representation, and if it is incapable of valid representation, then it is necessarily gratuitous. Scapin thus uses it as pure creation: his language is a creative verbal representation of nothingness. This use of language is a dramatic example of the phenomonological position that "existence creates la parole as an empirical support of its own non-being."[25] Scapin's language is an esthetic expression of his own genius rather than an attempted representation of 'truth'. In fact, when he is forced to tell the 'truth' (II, iii), he recounts a series of crimes. The only truth that language represents is an ugly one; this is hardly in line with Boileau's esthetic doctrine[26] and so would explain his dislike of the play. It is also counter to the tradition of 'bienséance', which might partially explain its lukewarm reception by the public. However, its dramatizing of the ineffectiveness of language as representation would be sufficient to assure it a quite limited public. Language fails as representation; its only value is the purely esthetic or exploitative one. The reasons for this failure have been outlined in reference to previous plays: language represents, and representation produces ambiguity; that ambiguity is strong enough to destroy the validity of representation; language be-

comes valid only in its esthetic and limited practical functions.

This interpretation of Scapin is, I realize, contrary to that of most. Antoine Adam, for example, finds that this play marks an end to the 'rire amer' found in plays such as L'Avare, George Dandin, and Monsieur de Pourceaugnac. I would suggest that the 'rire amer' has become a 'rire vide' in Scapin, as Scapin's existence seems based upon the non-existence of 'truth', or the truth of nothingness. On the conceptual level, it appears as a complete rejection of seventeenth-century values, offering little or nothing in their place.

Les Fourberies de Scapin is followed by La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas, a play that has a curious structural similarity to La Critique de l'Ecole des femmes. Like the Critique, it is a one-act play, of a primarily conversational nature. It emphasizes the idea of comedy, and has a pre-arranged ending (a comedy, whereas the Critique ended with supper). Although La Comtesse is not as clearly didactic as La Critique, it does suggest certain pertinent data for this study. The importance of language is emphasized; the Countess discovers that the language of Paris does not represent the same things once she returns to the pro-

vinces; the relativity of representative language is thus suggested. The Countess also enjoys a symbiotic situation similar to that of M. Jourdain; she is surrounded by suitors and sycophants. However, this symbiosis is destroyed once the other characters undergo a change of heart or of fortune, and the Countess is left with the least attractive suitor, watching a comedy. The symbiotic situation fails when it becomes subject to duration and change; its only validity is in the non-temporal world of the theatre. The one remaining solution to the ambiguity of 'représentation', that of symbiosis, is thus disposed of in this play. Its structural sibling, La Critique, had marked Molière's formal entrance into the world of 'représentation'; La Comtesse is his exit from that same world.

'Représentation' is still utilized to some extent in Les Femmes savantes, but only to accentuate its invalidity. This play presents a conflict between two aspects of representative language, its use as abstraction (Armande and Philaminte), and its concrete representation of practical concerns (Henriette and Chrysale).

Armande and Philaminte would use language to represent the abstract qualities of the mind, believing that language "sait régenter jusqu'aux rois," and thus is a means to power. Henriette

and her father use language to represent, respectively, the sexual and digestive capacities of the body. In the course of the play, both Armande and Henriette recognize the futility of their semantic structures and try to change them. Rather than lose Clitandre, Armande offers to be his wife (IV, ii; 1235-1240); that is, she is willing to abandon her abstract language structure for a more concrete relationship. Henriette, on the other hand, utilizes the abstract language structure to try to dissuade Trissotin from marrying her (V, i). Both Armande and Henriette fail, and must wait for the contrivances of Ariste to see a satisfactory resolution.

This last dramatization of the inadequacy of representative language is not the most important element in this play, as we shall see in the chapter dealing with 'signification'. Likewise, Le Malade imaginaire, although it may present certain aspects of representative language, goes well beyond 'représentation' and so will be considered later. At this point, it seems best to summarize Molière's treatment of representative language as it has been outlined so far.

Once Molière leaves the earlier farces, he begins to abandon the viewpoint of 'ressemblance'. He experiments with representative language until, in Les Fâcheux, he isolates it as the chief drama-

tic element. Then, in L'Ecole des femmes, he presents the possibilities of representative language as spectacle; this representation of representative language produces ambiguity; Molière denies this ambiguity in La Critique, but is well aware of it in the preface to Tartuffe. It is also in the Critique that he tells us that language is a form of dramatic action, and therefore representation.

The relationship of language and myth is first treated in La Princesse d'Elide and then in Tartuffe; in Dom Juan, representative language is substituted for mythical language, and mythology is shown to be ambiguous. The ambiguity of myth is presented in Amphitryon; myth is seen to derive from poetry and thus to be dependent on poets. In George Dandin, the ambiguity of myth has rendered it meaningless and therefore annihilated it.

Once it is seen that ambiguity is fatal to myth, that same ambiguity returns to representative language. The gratuitousness of language, deriving from its ambiguity, was first demonstrated in Dom Juan and then by Célimène in Le Misanthrope. Possible solutions to the problem of ambiguity include suicide (George Dandin), a return to 'ressemblance' and its various developments (ridicule for Alceste, madness and/or solitude for Harpagon, victimage in Pourceaugnac), and the re-invention

of language in a situation of verbal symbiosis (Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme). Finally, in Scapin, the invalidity of representative language is definitively dramatized. This, by analogy, suggests the invalidity of the entire age of representation. In La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas, Molière fills in a few details and makes his formal exit from the epistomological current of his contemporaries.

Once 'ressemblance' and 'représentation' are rejected, Molière is left with two choices: the first would be to repeat himself in his following plays; the second is to ascertain whether or not other possibilities of language exist. It is the latter choice that he makes, the result of which, as I hope to demonstrate, is a dramatic leap into the heretofore unexplored realm of language as meaning.

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

[1]See chapter I, note 8. Scherer quotes d'Aubignac to this effect; Sellstrom quotes Scaliger as well as d'Aubignac, and W. G. Moore summarizes thusly: ".....for the French, the sole and entire vehicle of dramatic action is the spoken word" (op. cit., p. 53).

[2]Burke (op. cit.) has already been mentioned; his view of language as dramatic action is termed 'dramatism'. Jean-Paul Sartre also sees language as action, as a form of 'engagement', in Situations II, Qu'est-ce que la littérature? Gallimard (Paris), 1948, p. 73.

[3]This is the starting point of Chomsky's Cartesian Linguistics (see chapter I, note 1).

[4]Philip E. Lewis, op. cit. (chapter I, note 4).

[5]Micheline Sakharoff, "L'Etourdi de Molière, ou l'école des innocents", in The French Review, vol. XXLIII, no. 2, Dec. 1969, pp. 240-248.

[6]Molière, Oeuvres complètes, op. cit., p. 100.

[7]J. D. Hubert, Molière and the Comedy of Intellect. University of California Press (Berkely; Los Angeles), 1962, p. 47.

[8]Ibid., p. 53.

[9]Adam, op. cit., p. 276.

[10]Our position here is that, whatever else the raisonneur's role might be, it is also that of a representative of the spectator's moral viewpoint. This view is held by Moore, Lancaster, Guicharnaud, and others. For a summary of attitudes taken in interpreting the raisonneur, see Francis L. Lawrence, Molière: The Comedy of Unreason. Tulane Studies in Romance Languages and Literature, no. 2, Tulane University (New Orleans), 1968, pp. 23-33.

[11]Hubert (op. cit., p. 49) recognizes the discrepancy between Ariste's age and his acts, but refrains from drawing the logical conclusion that Ariste is a comic character.

[12]Jacques Guicharnaud, in his introduction to Molière: A COllection of Critical Essays (cited in chapter II, note 1), dwells at length on the psychological importance of this play (pp. 4-6), through which, he writes, Molière accomplishes "the transition from entertainment to true theater in an intolerable leap." From our point of view, he also accomplishes the transition from language to metalanguage in that representative language becomes a representation of itself.

[13]Hubert, op. cit., p. 72.

[14]Ibid., p. 79. Hubert treats Arnolphe's identification with God from another perspective.

[15]Foucault, op. cit., p. 107. See also P.-Félix Thomas, La Philosophie de Gassendi. Originally published Paris: 1889. Reprinted by Burt Franklin (New York), 1967, p. 215.

[16]"Réponse aux Observations touchant Le Festin de Pierre de Monsieur de Molière", in Molière, Oeuvres Complètes, ed. Despois-Mesnard, tome V, Hachette (Paris), 1922, p. 234.

[17]Adam, op. cit., pp. 334-335.

[18]J. H. McCaskill, The 'Raisonneur' in the Plays of Molière: A Critical Study. Unpublished Thesis at Louisiana State University (Baton Rouge), 1966.

[19]Suzanne Langer, Feeling and Form. Charles Scribner's Sons (New York), 1953, pp. 307-315. She writes: "In drama speech is an act, an utterance, motivated by visible and invisible other acts, and like them shaping the oncoming future." This movement toward the future is accentuated when each act ends on an anticipated declaration, as in Mélicerte. Time and language are thus made to coincide in their mutual movement towards an unknown future.

[20]Lionel Gossman, Men and Masks: A Study of Molière. The Johns Hopkins Press (Baltimore), 1963, p. 1 and following.

[21]Chomsky, op. cit., p. 3 and elsewhere. As this is one of the major facts upon which Chomsky's study is based, it is repeated several times throughout the text.

[22]Molière, Le Bourgeois gentilhomme, edited with an introduction by H. Gaston Hall, University of London Press, 1966, p. 12.

[23]Thomas, La Philosophie de Gassendi, p. 215.

[24]Hubert, op. cit., p. 237.

[25]Philip E. Lewis, op. cit., p. 33.

[26]Julian Eugene White, Jr., Nicolas Boileau, Twayne Publishers, Inc. (New York), 1969, pp. 123-125.

[27]Adam, op. cit., p. 386.

CHAPTER IV

'SIGNIFICATION': LANGUAGE AND MEANING

'Signification' develops with 'historicité': an event is epistomologically valid if it is a legitimate product of a historical evolution. In the case of language, a word (or phrase, or grammatical structure) possesses meaning in relationship to the linguistic changes that precede it. The larger effect of this is to remove the validity of language from its representativity and place it in circumstances exterior to the actual verbal manifestation. 'Meaning' is thus found to lie beneath or between words; this meaning may originate in the subconscious, as in psychoanalysis, or in cultural and environmental forces as well as in historical ones. What is said, or how it is said, becomes less important than why it is said and the surrounding circumstances that determine its being said.

The tendency of Molière's theatre towards 'signification' is evident as early as the preface to Tartuffe, where he shows himself to be aware of and concerned about the philosophical problems of language, particularly that of ambiguity. In the play itself, there is one remarkable use of language that suggests a dramatic interpretation of 'signification'.

In Act III, scene vi, Tartuffe, confronted with Damis' accusation, admits to Orgon that he is a worthless criminal and begs to be thrown from the house (1074-1086; 1091-1106). Instead, Orgon chases Damis away. In reference to this scene, W. G. Moore writes:

> "Is not this a new discovery in dramatic ambiguity? Molière here attains, it seems to me, that razor-edge of language which (pace Mr. Empson) it is not quite right to call ambiguity. For this statement cannot be taken in one of two or more ways; it has different meanings to different people, and in particular one meaning for the dupe and another for the audience."[1]

Moore goes on to call this principle 'dramatic irony', by which he means "this use of language against the intention of the user but obeying the intention of the dramatist."[2] However, this is not a use of language against Tartuffe's intention; it is used precisely because he knows what it will accomplish, what meaning Orgon will derive from it. He knows that Orgon will interpret his words differently from Damis, and, because Orgon enjoys paternal authority, Damis will be defeated. It is the existential situation itself that has created the necessity of this verbal endeavor; Tartuffe's words thus have meaning because of exterior causes. In a sense, Tartuffe has conquered the

ambiguity of language by going from 'représentation' to 'signification'.

In the final act of Dom Juan, the title character tells his servant:

> "Je veux bien, Sganarelle, t'en faire confidence, et je suis bien aise d'avoir un témoin du fond de mon âme, et des véritables motifs qui m'obligent à faire les choses" (V, ii).

He wants to have a witness to his true conduct, but he does not tell why he desires such a witness. Certainly there is the dramatic necessity of letting the spectators know that he has not, as he told Dom Louis, been converted. Another reason, however, is likely; that Dom Juan needs a witness to authenticate the Dom Juan legend. If there were no witness, then the legend would end with his conversion. It is Sganarelle who will tell the world that Dom Juan died as he lived, without repenting. It is true that Sganarelle's interpretation of the myth is not that of Dom Juan, yet what is important is that the myth exist, that "il ne sera pas dit, quoi qu'il arrive, que je sois capable de me repentir." The myth will continue to be represented despite its ambiguity; Dom Juan thus gains a certain historical authenticity. Myth is replaced by historicity; the meaning of Dom Juan thus transcends the ambiguity of its representation.

In L'Avare, the potential of 'signification' is briefly suggested. Before Harpagon recovers his 'cassette', everything that he says has one meaning, and that meaning revolves around his money. Every word he hears or utters is related to his 'cassette'; when Valère speaks of his love for Harpagon's daughter, he understands only desire for his money. In his fixity, Harpagon carries language beyond the stage of 'représentation' to that of 'signification.' The meaning of words is not in what they represent, but in whatever lies beneath their surface. And 'signification', of course, is insanity in the age of 'représentation'.

In these few instances, 'signification' is peripheral to other uses of language; however, they do seem to indicate an awareness of its potential and a possible tendency towards a more elaborate development of its possibilities. It is in Les Femmes savantes, I believe, that this development is realized.

It was pointed out previously that Les Femmes savantes dramatizes the incompatibility of abstract and concrete manifestations of representative language; this, of course, reinforces the invalidity of representative language shown in Scapin. However, Les Femmes savantes also under-

takes a profound study of the word-object relationship. This is indicated in the opening lines of the play and is carried through to the dénouement. One word, 'mariage', is uttered at the play's opening (verse 7) and its interpretation by the different characters provides the major dramatic impetus of the play. It provides the opportunity to produce a different reaction from everyone. Armande reacts:

> "Ne concevez-vous point ce que,
> dès qu'on l'entend,
> Un tel mot à l'esprit offre de
> dégoûtant?
> De quelle étrange image on est
> par lui blessée?
> Sur quelle sale vue il traîne
> la pensée?" (9-12)

A word produces an image; a verbal sign creates a visual one; this alone appears unique in Molière's theatre. It does, moreover, indicate the power of language, just as the different images produced by the same word indicate its relativity. For Armande, the word produces an unpleasant image; it refers to a lower level of existence. Henriette, on the other hand, sees pleasure and satisfaction, the personal fulfilment of what she sees as her female duty, in the word. Their mother, Philaminte, interprets the word in another sense; for her, Henriette's marriage (with Trissotin instead of Clitandre) refers to the possibility of developing Henriette's intellect and assuring herself

a full-time pedant. Chrysale, with some help from Ariste, sees the marriage as an opportunity for self-assertion; he might be able to win a contest of wills with Philaminte while incidentally granting the wishes of his favorite daughter. Trissotin sees in marriage the potential satisfaction of his lust for Henriette and for her parents' money; Béline, the insane aunt, interprets every mention of the word 'mariage' as a request for her own hand. Clitandre seems to see marriage with Henriette as primarily a means of spiting Armande, who refused him for two years, and the 'savantes' in general; he is their rival as well as, or even more so than he is Henriette's suitor. And Ariste, the raisonneur, communicates the expected sympathies of the spectators.[3]

The varied interpretations of this one word would seem to emphasize as never before the ambiguity of language; because of its ambiguity, language fails as representation and as communication. Yet somehow a certain communication is achieved, tentative and even artificial as it may be. The failure of language as representation because of its ambiguity suggests, in fact, the replacement of representative language by signifying language. The meaning of language is not found in its words, in what it represents, but in what lies between

or beneath the words. 'Représentation' becomes 'signification', but it is a relative signification, depending on the persepctive of each character. Words 'mean' what individuals take them to mean, not what common usage dictates or what an authority has decreed. As such, ambiguity is the necessary result of verbal communication and representative language. It is this ambiguity that leads to 'signification'; language apparently has some meaning since some communication takes place; this meaning, however, is to be found in the psychical rather than the physiological speech manifestations. If verbal communication is invalid, it is more invalid when it is purely verbal, or 'metalinguistic' (here, in the case of the savantes); it gains a certain degree of validity when it can be replaced by non-verbal processes of communication (such as sex, in Henriette's case). However, this validity is colored by the necessity of ever returning to language and thus to ambiguity.

The 'folle', Béline, is insane only in that she exaggerates the ambiguity of language manifested by everyone else; like them, she interprets words in terms of her own being; it is only lack of versimilitude that renders them and her ridiculous to the point of insanity. Words have whatever meaning we give them; this is what Béline manifests,

and, in so doing, she becomes a personification of ambiguity. It is through her that we recognize not only the relativity and ambiguity of words, but also the necessity that they mean something other than what they purport to represent. And, if language is signification, it is also insanity. Again, we return to Béline and, by extension, to the other characters. Insanity, after all, is simply an extreme manifestation of 'disconvenance', of nonconformity to accepted norms of conduct, an extreme dimension of 'le ridicule'. And language too can be a form of insanity if it is extremely different from the given linguistic standard; 'signification' is insanity in the age of 'représentation'.

Language as insanity: this seems to hold on both the concrete and the abstract levels of language. Béline, in a sense, belongs to both levels, as she communicates just as easily and just as readily with Chrysale as with Philaminte. Her madness is an exaggerated image of their own failures. The importance of her presence should give added weight to her final words, a warning to Clitandre:

> "Qu'il prenne garde au moins
> que je suis dans son coeur;
> Par un prompt désespoir souvent
> on se marie,
> Qu'on s'en repent après tout le
> temps de sa vie" (1774-1776).

Of course, it would be absurd to take her words literally; their importance lies in Bé-line's function as the personification of the insanity of language. Insofar as marriage is a non-verbal communication, it is valid; however, once one returns to the verbal level of communication, the danger of ambiguity is ever present; it is that which is "dans son coeur."[4] The ambiguity of words, personified here by Béline, will continue to re-appear.

In Les Femmes savantes, then, language loses its representative function and takes on one of 'signification', one in which it suggests a meaning other than the given verbal one. This tendency, from 'représentation' to 'signification', exists at least since Tartuffe, when the philosophical as well as the dramatic dimensions of verbal ambiguity are indicated; it is dramatized for a moment in Dom Juan and L'Avare; then, in Scapin, the representative function of language is dismissed to be replaced by 'signification' in Les Femmes savantes. There, this new function of language becomes insanity because of its displacement in time.

In Le Malade imaginaire, Argan never gives a specific name to his illness, but the content of the play leads one to believe that it is

a quite universal one: the fear of death. Argan is well aware of the mortality of his body. His attention is therefore fixed on its preservation. His constant ingestion of medicine (even the food he eats, 'bouilli' and 'vin trempé', are more like liquid medicines than substantial nourishment), followed by enemas, is analogous to a constant embalming procedure: the natural liquids of the body are replaced by artificial ones, whose function, among other things, is to "faire reposer monsieur." This eternal embalming makes of Argan a living corpse, a person defying death by imitating it.

To keep himself from dying, Argan has constant recourse to his doctor, Purgon, and apothecary, Fleurant. They, however, are not enough; he even attempts to marry his daughter to a doctor in order to have his own personal physician (I, v). Like any man afraid of death, Argan composes his will (I, vii). Then he witnesses a death. Little Louision 'dies' and Argan, for a moment, suffers the despair of a dying man confronted with the spectacle of death (II, viii). He regains his composure when he discovers that Louison was only feigning death. Argan's own fears are not soothed when Béralde chases away his apothecary (III, iv), which results in Dr. Purgon's condemning him to die in four days (III, v). Even the arrival of a new

'doctor' (Toinette) does little to calm him.

Finally, Argan 'dies'. Indeed, it is only a theatrical death, yet it has certain effects that true death might. Béline reveals her true sentiments about her husband, then Angélique mourns the loss of her father. Argan discovers (as surely as though he had gone to Heaven and been told by God himself) the truth about the members of his family.

After death comes Argan's resurrection - or his beatification, as he becomes a member of the Faculté de Médecine, that august, immortal body that possesses all knowledge relevant to life and death. By becoming his ideal, Argan can be his own patient and doctor; he can be total object and subject to himself.

This interpretation of Le Malade imaginaire, which might be termed a burlesque of life, death and immortality, is meant to illustrate what J. D. Hubert calls 'theater as metaphor.' The theory, also suggested by Adam* is that the alleged satire of the medical profession in this play can easily be transferred to the Faculté de Théologie.

This metaphorical function of the play should appear more pertinent in consideration of

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*Adam, op. cit., pp. 395-396.

the fact that this is the first (and last) play to follow Molière's dramatization of a new concept of language and, in all probability, of theatre. It appears but a short step from a theatre of metaphor to a theatre of meaning; metaphor, in this context, suggests meaning. At the same time, metaphor suggests resemblance: 'ressemblance' and 'signification' may thus coincide in Molière's final dramatic work.

Other aspects of 'ressemblance' have been noted earlier. Representative language also plays an important role in this play: Béline represents herself as a faithful spouse until her husband's 'death', at which time she reveals her deception. Louision represents herself as dead by saying that she is dead. And Béralde, a rather unique raisonneur, verbally represents the medical profession as fraudulent.

What may well be most important in this play, however, is that Molière himself appears under three distinct aspects. First, it is Molière the actor who interprets the role of Argan. Since Molière's own hypochondria was no secret, he must have realized that many would see in Argan a similarity to himself (which they did, according to Grimarest).

Béralde's strong criticism of the medical profession is odd behavior for a raisonneur, who usually adopts a very moderate viewpoint that conforms to that of the average spectator. Again, Béralde must almost necessarily have been interpreted as Molière's spokesman in reference to medicine and doctors; Molière's antipathy to the profession was believed by his contemporaries to extend beyond the limits of the theatre.

Thirdly, Molière's name is mentioned in the course of the play (III, iii). He is spoken of as director and dramatist; he thus emphasizes his own relationship to the play, suggesting that he is intimately involved in its creation and therefore in its meaning.

Argan resembles Mloière, Beralde speaks for Molière, and Molière is necessary to the play's meaning. He thus appears in terms of 'ressemblance', of 'représentation', and of 'signification'. These three concepts of language, and indeed of existence, are combined in this final play.

Purgon condemns Argan to die in four days; after the fourth performance, Molière dies. The 'ressemblance' is thus complete. However, the act of dying also completes the significative aspect of the play. By insisting that he perform "le pouvant faire absolument" and thereby causing his

own death, Molière creates a legend of himself that is inextricably related to his final play. He assures himself a certain historical authenticity; he gives meaning to himself and to the play in terms of 'historicité' and therefore in terms of 'signification'. His death in his last play is thus a necessary structural element in that play. It becomes necessary for our understanding and appreciation of it.

Today, the authorship of Molière's early farces is still questioned in some circles. Not too many years ago, it was suggested that Corneille was the author of Molière's plays. It is not impossible that similar attempts might be made at some time in the future. Molière lived at a time when to be distinguished was to be considered ridiculous; he may well have thought that such an attitude could easily lead to the diminishing of the author's importance to his work. In that case, his intimate and necessary relationship to his last play can be seen as an attempt to authenticate himself in terms of his plays; to give meaning to a person who, after all, was little more than a refined buffoon to many of his contemporaries, although a sublime genius on any stage.

We may now be in a position to appreciate

André Gide's reaction to this play: he called it "la plus neuve, la plus hardie, la plus belle" of Molière's works.[5] If it is a theatre of metaphor and of meaning, a combination of 'ressemblance', 'représentation' and signification in an esthetic whole, and a personal affirmation of a dying genius, then its novelty, courage and beauty should be self-evident. By closing Molière's career, it opens the theatre onto its infinite possibilities.

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

[1]Moore, op. cit., p. 64.

[2]Ibid., p. 65.

[3]Here, incidentally, the more conservative male spectators have the opportunity of sympathizing with the father as well as with the young lovers.

[4]This could help to explain the phenomenon that, in Molière's plays, almost all of the married couples are unhappy ones, except when their marriage coincides with the dénouement (and not always then). Insofar as love is non-verbal, it is valid; once verbalized, it becomes ambiguous and even dangerous.

[5]Quoted by Moore, op. cit., p. 23.

CHAPTER V

MOLIERE'S STATEMENTS ON LANGUAGE

Outside the plays themselves, certain other writings by Molière deal with the problem of language and other related aspects of his art. A consideration of these statements would seem to be in order. Some have been mentioned in previous chapters; those will be abbreviated here. Certain other statements contained in the plays will be included where such an inclusion appears pertinent.

First, there is the name change from Poquelin to Molière. As this coincides with Molière's decision to become an actor, it should be interpreted as symbolic of his rupture with established social and religious values. The society from which he separates himself becomes the object of his comedy; because of this, he chooses a name that is not recognizable as that of a member of that society. He uses a different name to represent a different person and also a different social category. The new name may well have had another function, as it was that of the author (and former actor) of a popular novel.[1] The function of this name change is thus symbolic of Molière's rupture with his past, representative of the 'new' man of the theatre, similar to that of a well known man of letters and, incidentally, a means of separating

the professional from the private person (in L'Impromptu de Versailles, he pleads with his rivals not to slander his personal life, although they amy do as they please with his professional personality). Language as symbol, as representation, as resemblance, as mask: all of these are implied by the name change.

It is in the preface to Les Précieuses ridicules that Molière first distinguishes between the written and performed play. "C'est une chose étrange qu'on imprime les gens malgré eux," he tells us. The written play is not the same thing as the performance, for "une grande partie des grâces qu'on y a trouvées dépendent de l'action et du ton de voix." The language of comedy is oral and thus is insufficiently represented by the written word.

It is also in this preface that he first tells us some of his ideas on the theatre. He writes that "le public est le juge absolu de ces sortes d'ouvrages," meaning by 'public' his spectators rather than the readers of a printed edition. Further on, he tells us that "ces vicieuses imitations de ce qu'il y a de plus parfait ont été de tout temps la matière de la comédie." By 'vicieuses imitations' he is referring to provincial

imitation of Parisian préciosité. He seems to suggest the existence of a standard of perfection (ostentatiously Parisian préciosité here) from which deviation is comic.* A standard of excellence exists; those who conform to it are 'honnêtes'; those who do not are comic.

Molière also speaks here of the possibility of his writing about the theatre. It is with obvious mockery that he writes:

> ".....je ne manque point de livres qui m'auraient fourni tout ce qu'on peut dire de savant sur la tragédie et la comédie, l'étymologie de toutes deux, leur origine, leur définition, et le reste."

For a man of the theatre, the etymology and definition of dramatic genres are hardly primary pursuits. At the same time, this indicates a dismissal of the sixteenth-century belief in the importance of commentary, and perhaps, by the partial revelation of his esthetic concepts, a look towards criticism.

In this short preface, Molière has indicated certain basic concerns about language and about the theatre. The language of the theatre is

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*Obviously, the question as to which brand of préciosité was satirized in the play is of no concern here; what is important is the esthetic principle at work.

oral, and only a part of the dramatic work; it should not be subjected to the printing press. At the same time, he notes the importance of the spectator to the play and poses a standard of excellence from which to judge what is comic. Not only does he dismiss the written play; he also dismisses the concept of written commentary.

In a foreword to Les Fâcheux, Molière continues in the same vein:

> ".....le temps viendra de faire imprimer mes remarques sur les pièces que j'aurai faites, et je ne désespère pas de faire voir un jour, en grand auteur, que je puis citer Aristote et Horace. En attendant cet examen, qui peut-être ne viendra point, je m'en remets assez aux décisions de la multitude et je tiens aussi difficile de combattre un ouvrage que le public approuve, que d'en défendre un qu'il condamne."[2]

Again, it is with tongue in cheek that he speaks of writing about his plays; again, he speaks of the importance of the spectators in determining the value of a play. This consistency of attitude must be interpreted as statements of two important principles in Molière's work. First, he tends toward a rejection of written representation or commentary concerning his works; they have no important relationship to the written word.

Second, the theatre is itself a means of communication; it involves the spectators as well as the actors, director and performance. He seems to subordinate dramatic theory (represented by written commentary or criticism) to the practice of the theatre, with its oral, active language. He thus indicates that he considers himself a dramatist, director and actor rather than a critic or moralist. He evidently wants his plays to be judged in this light.

In the preface to L'Ecole des Femmes, Molière writes:

> "Bien des gens ont frondé d'abord cette comédie; mais les rieurs ont été pour elle, et tout le mal qu'on en a pu dire n'a pu faire qu'elle n'ait eu un succès dont je me contente."[3]

Again, he brings in the importance of the spectators, the 'rieurs' who prove the esthetic value of a comedy. At the same time, the success of the comedy is seen as a dialectical element: the comedy has been criticized, but its very success is an answer to that criticism. The same idea is heightened later in the same text, as he writes, "je m'en tiens assez vengé par la réussite de ma comédie." Rather than a direct verbal answer, Molière provides a dramatic one. Thus the

theatre functions in at least two dialogues. The first is the play-spectator relationship mentioned above; the second is the relationship between the author and his critics.

In the Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes, as already mentioned, Molière first speaks of language as dramatic action and, by extension, as representation. At this point, he seems to be in general accord with contemporary views on language. In L'Impromptu de Versailles, he elaborates the possibilities of the dramatic and critical dialectics. He tells us that to attack a play is to criticize the spectators rather than the author (scene v), and the the spectators 'respond' by approving another play by the same author. Each successful play produces a reaction from its detractors; each reaction is answered by another successful play. Each dramatic dialectic (the relationship between dramatist, play, and spectators) produces a critical dialectic (between the play and its detractors); the total dialectic is potentially endless.

It is also in this play that Molière calls special attention to a passage dealing with the creation of comic characters (scene iv). Brécourt begins to recite the passage, then Molière

interrupts to show how it should be represented. It is here that he tells us that he obtains his comic types from contemporary models; that no one changes his conduct in spite of having his foibles displayed publicly; that the creation of comic types is practically and potentially infinite.

Molière thus suggests two possible infinities deriving from comedy. One, the infinite dialectic, is primarily an infinity of time. The other, that of comic subjects, is primarily a spatial infinity. Indeed, this recalls the infinite representativity of language suggested in Les Fâcheux.

We have seen earlier that Molière mocks the concept of language as 'ressemblance' in the personnage of Pancrace in Le Mariage forcé. This, of course, is quite in line with the development of language as 'représentation'.

The Lettre sur la Comédie de l'Imposteur is now generally accepted as a valid expression of Molière's esthetic thought.[4] It does contain certain statements of religious belief which are not necessarily those of Molière; however, this is to be expected when one considers that the Lettre was parially intended to placate religious opposition to Tartuffe. Most of the ideas on esthetics and language contained in the Lettre

are stated or clearly implied in other writings by Molière or evident in the plays. Regardless of the extent of Molière's collaboration on the Lettre, it does coincide with scattered statements made elsewhere, so that it can provide a concise record of his ideas on the nature of comedy and, to an extent, of language.

In referring to Tartuffe, the author of the Lettre mentions the power of language several times. He speaks of "ces gens-là.....sur qui les paroles peuvent tout,"[5] who immediately ascribe high moral qualities to anyone happening to speak in religious terms. He speaks of Orgon's subservience to language and his inability to use it lucidly. Again, "on ne sauroit dire combien les paroles peuvent sur les esprits des hommes" (p. 41). (In speaking of Tartuffe, we have seen the importance of Tartuffe's use of language as freedom and language as power; in this play, the power of language reaches its apex in the official voice of the King). The author of the Lettre also suggests that the moral value of the play consists in the exposition of certain modes of linguistic expression used for ignoble ends; this exposition renders them ridiculous and therefore useless. The specific example he cites is the use of casuistry to seduce women; since Tartuffe has ridi-

culed this means of seduction, it will lose its effectiveness (p. 59). This example may appear ludicrous to some,[6] but it does imply that, if the play has a moral value, it derives from the structure of the play itself, which would be in accordance with the best neo-classical theory.[7]

Still speaking of the play itself, the author repeats one of Molière's favorite principles:

> "....je doute mesme si sa lecture tout entiere pourroit faire juger tout l'effet que produit sa representation." (p. 59)

Again, the difference between the written play and its performance is brought out. Considering the difficulty the play had with certain elements of its public, what is suggested here may be that the written play suggests a content other than the performance. In that case, the written play would present an ambiguity that the performance should not.

The stated purpose of the Lettre is to define 'le ridicule', or what is comic. The principle ideas have already been presented by Professor Moore. For present purposes, they may be summarized thusly: what is ridiculous is that which does not conform to what is supposed to be.

Tartuffe is ridiculous because he is supposed to be pious, whereas he is not. There is thus a 'disconvenance' between what is and what is supposed to be. It is through reason that we distinguish this 'disconvenance'; however, it does not become comic until it touches the imagination. This would seem to indicate that the 'disconvenance' is comic only if we regard it as imaginary, or distinct from ourselves. The examples of 'disconvenance' given include 'mensonge','déguisement', 'fourberie', and 'dissimulation'.[8]

This idea of what is comic can be compared to that suggested in the preface to Les Précieuses ridicules. There, the ridiculous was defined as that which imitated without equalling a given standard of excellence. The 'disconvenance' was evidently that betwee what the 'précieuses' thought they were and what the other characters (as well as the spectators) saw them as. In their case, ignorance could be added to the above-mentioned examples of 'disconvenance'.

Another aspect of comedy is discussed near the end of the Lettre. Seeing the comic character, we recognize his error and see ourselves as free from that error:

> "...donc nous sommes en cela plus eclairez, plus parfaits, enfin plus que

> lui. Or cette connaissance d'estre plus qu'un autre, est fort agreable à la nature; de là vient que le mepris qui enferme cette connoissance est toujours accompagné de joie; or cette joie et ce mepris composent le mouvement qu'excite le ridicule dans ceux qui le voyent...." (p. 71)

The explanation given for this feeling of superiority is expressed in terms related to religious doctrine:

> "....comme ces deux sentiments /joie, mepris/ sont fondez sur les deux plus anciennes et plus essentielles maladies du genre humain, l'orgueuil et la complaisance dans les maux d'autrui, il n'est pas etrange que le sentiment du ridicule soit si fort, et qu'il ravisse l'âme comme il fait; elle qui se defiant à bon droit de sa propre excellence depuis le peché d'origine, cherche de tous cotez avec avidité de quoi la persuader aux autres et à soi-même par des comparaisons qui lui soient avantageuses, c'est-à-dire par la consideration des defauts d'autrui" (pp. 71-72).

The feeling of superiority felt by the spectator of a comic situation is in fact based upon incertitude and a fear of inferiority. We may laugh at Orgon because he does not measure up to accepted values of 'honnêteté', yet we may well entertain doubts about our own relationship to

that or any other standard. Although the comedy may reinforce the spectator's desire to be superior, it does not, in any absolute sense, justify his superiority. For it is 'à bon droit' that this anxiety exists. We have seen, in preceding chapters, how Molière treated certain characters who functioned as the spectator's porte-parole or onstage representative. There are instances in which the spectator's anxieties are justified rather than consoled (for instance, Sganarelle in Dom Juan).

Although religious terminology is used here, this theory of comedy could easily be subscribed to by a sceptic, as it rests upon a problematic conception of the human condition. Indeed, the author of the Lettre seems to cast doubt upon the a priori validity of any given standard of reference.

There is one other statement dealing expressly with language which, when removed from its religious context, appears quite interesting:

> "La religion a ses lieux et ses tems affectez pour ses sacrifices, ses ceremonies, et ses autres mysteres; on ne peut les transporter ailleurs sans crime; mais ses veritez qui se produisent par la parole, sont de tous tems et de tous lieux; parce que le parler estant necessaire en tout et par-

> tout, il est toujours plus utile et plus saint de l'employer à publier la verité et à prêcher la vertu, qu'à quelqu'autre sujet que ce soit" (pp. 56-57).

This text is part of a passage in which the author of the Lettre claims that Molière's purpose is to return the theatre to its 'premiere saincteté'; this is to be accomplished by denouncing hypocrisy and exalting 'la veritable devotion.' As such, it seems to have a direct relationship to the esthetic and moral interpretation of the play. The language of religion, unlike its non-verbal aspects, is not limited by time or place. As such, its reproduction on stage is not indecent; it seems even to be necessary because of the nature of language and the moral aspect of the theatre. Language produces 'veritez' instead of only communicating them; it thus has a creative capacity unlimited by time or space; it is infinite. This infinity of the creative power of language corresponds to the previously mentioned infinities of the dramatic and critical dialectics. The author considers 'parole' and 'parler', the oral rather than written manifestations of language, which would certainly be that which Molière knew best. Language here seems to have a highly important place in the theatre; not only is it the ethical vehicle of a

play; it is also the endless source of creativity. This view of language is quite modern; its infinity is expressed in Chomsky's theory of competence;[9] its creative aspect corresponds to Merleau-Ponty's idea of "la parole parlante."[10]

The relationship of language and space corresponds to the theory of dramatic action; if language is action (as mentioned in reference to L'Ecole des femmes), it represents in space; it occupies space and tends to fill it. As the author of the Lettre says, it is "necessaire en tout et partout."

The Lettre ends on a note quite proper to the seventeenth century and to Molière in particular:

> "...je m'accoutume insensiblement, Dieu merci, à rire de tout comme les autres, et à ne regarder toutes les choses qui se passent dans le monde, que comme les diverses scenes de la grande comedie qui se joue sur la terre entre les Hommes" (p. 75).

Such a conclusion is hardly novel in the century of 'représentation'; however, in the context of the Lettre, its significance is far from little. If the world is a comedy, then the theatre is necessarily a microcosm and therefore justifiable. If all men are comic figures in the macrocosm,

then the microcosm, the theatre, is potentially as vast as the world; that is, potentially infinite. And, if all men are comic figures, the aforementioned comic standard is highly relative and extremely fragile. In his plays, Molière appears to have exploited this observation to its limits.

In the preface to the definitive Tartuffe, Molière brings out several ideas stated in the Lettre sur l'Imposteur. Elsewhere, W. G. Moore's passage on this preface is mentioned; he concludes that it shows Molière's awareness of the philosophy of language and that the greatest problem of language lies in its ambiguity, which, paradoxically, is also one of its primary strengths in a comic situation. Other passages in the preface, dealing with the analysis of the play, correspond to passages in the Lettre. Also as in the Lettre, the religious origins of comedy are spoken of in an attempt to justify the moral purpose of comedy in general and Tartuffe in particular.

In the preface, as in the Lettre, Molière suggests that the moral value of comedy derives from its structure. He writes that "l'emploi de la comédie est de corriger les vices des hommes." In a placet presented to the King in 1664, he had written: "Sire, le devoir de la co-

mędie estant de corriger les hommes en les divertissant.....," which seems to be the first fusion of poetic and rhetoric in Molière's statements on comedy (Indeed, in L'Impromptu de Versailles, we were told that men did not abandon their faults in spite of having them put up to ridicule).

Certainly the tribulations encountered by Molière after the first performance of Tartuffe accounted in large part for his defending his comedy on moral principles. To some extent, this moral justification of comedy contradicts previous statements; however, this does not necessarily imply that the expressed moral justification was added only for the sake of convenience. In fact, the detail of the Lettre and the preface would seem to suggest that he was serious about the didactic purpose of his work. The statement that the play as a whole expresses the moral as well as the esthetic dimension suggests that the play's structure determines its meaning. It would be invalid, for example, to say that, since Tartuffe behaves in many ways like a priest, the play is an attack on religion; it should only be considered an attack on religious hypocrisy. The suggestion in the Lettre that moral truth is produced by language would further imply that, even were Tartuffe dressed as a priest (as he may have been

in the original version), his language should dispel any doubt as to his character or the author's purpose.

In a notice to L'Amour médecin, presented in 1665, before the Lettre sur l'Imposteur and the preface to the final Tartuffe, Molière writes:

> "Il n'est pas nécessaire de vous avertir qu'il y a beaucoup de choses qui dépendent de l'action: on sait bien que les comédies ne sont faites que pour être jouées, et je ne conseille de lire celle-ci qu'aux personnes qui ont des yeux pour découvrir dans la lecture tout le jeu du théâtre" (Oeuvres, Pléiade, v. 2, p. 95).

Again, he repeats that the performance of a comedy is superior to its written representation; however, he does suggest that some persons may be able to profit almost as much from the written text. This slight condescension to the written word may suggest incertitude about his previously expressed principles of theatre; after all, his detractors seem to have gained a measure of success by means of the written word; there may be something of value in it.

The letters concerning Dom Juan and Le Misanthrope repeat much of what has already been mentioned. The second letter on Dom Juan, however, contains this interesting epistomological passage:

> "Je vous laisse à juger si un homme /Rochemont, who had written an especially vitriolic attack on Molière/ sans passion et poussé par un véritable esprit de charité parleroit de la sorte: "Certes c'est bien à faire à Molière de parler de la dévotion, avec laquelle il a si peu de commerce et qu'il n'a jamais connue ni par pratique ne par théorie." Je crois que votre suprise est grande, et que vous ne pensiez pas qu'un homme qui veut passer pour charitable put s'emporter jusques à dire des choses tellement contraires à la charité. Est-ce comme un chrétien doit parler de son frère? Sait-il le fond de sa conscience? Le connait-il assez pour cela? A-t-il toujours été avec lui? Est-il enfin un homme qui puisse parler de la conscience d'un autre par conjecture, et qui puisse assurer que son prochain ne vaut rien et même qu'il n'a jamais rien valu?' Les termes sont significatifs, la pensée n'est point enveloppée, et le jamais y est dans toute l'étendue que l'on lui peut donner."[11]

What is particularly interesting in this passage is that its author does not attempt to defend Molière's religious beliefs; rather,,he points out the weaknesses in Rochemont's arguments. The rhetorical question, "Est-il enfin un homme qui puisse parler de la conscience d'un autre par conjecture, et qui puisse assurer que son prochain ne vaut rien et même qu'il n'a jamais rien valu?" illustrates

the impossibility of ever judging anyone with any accuracy. One person can never know another; human relationships are therefore necessarily ambiguous. This concept of ambiguity is particularly appropriate, since it is brought out in relationship to what is probably Molière's most ambiguous play.

The Lettre écrite sur la comédie du Misanthrope brings out several other interesting bits of information. It tells us, in several places, that the play's purpose is to "parler contre les moeurs du siècle." The act of speaking is referred to quite often in this letter; this would seem to indicate that the play's function as communication and representation was clearly evident to the author of the letter (probably Donneau de Visé) and to Molière as well. It also suggests what was indicated in the Lettre sur l'Imposteur and the preface to Tartuffe: that the play as a whole conveys its moral purpose, and that this purpose is produced through language, through 'le parler'. It is also in this letter that the phrase 'rire dans l'âme' occurs, used in describing a certain type of comedy of which Le Misanthrope is an example. This may indicate a new concept of comedy and therefore an evolution of Molière's dramatic art. A final quotation from this letter seems to strengthen the idea of an evolving esthe-

tic:

> "Molière, par une adresse qui lui est particulière, laisse partout deviner plus qu'il ne dit, et n'imite pas ceux qui parlent beaucoup et ne disent rien."[12]

Here the use of ambiguity as an esthetic concept is hinted at. This statement contrasts with that of Uranie in La Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes:

> "Il ne faut pas y /dans la comédie/ vouloir voir ce qui n'y est pas."[13]

The interpretation of a comedy is no longer a clear and evident communication between the play and its public. Molière seems to have become too well aware of the problem of ambiguity (in language, in human relationships, and in the theatre) not to explicitly utilize it in his dramatic creations.

Molière's statements on language and comedy end after 1669, but up to that time they indicate an evolution, which one might expect to see continue in subsequent plays. The various writings mentioned appear to verify the results obtained from analyzing Molière's plays. He begins his career by exploiting the dramatic possibilities of 'ressemblance'; by the time he is ready to write about language per se, he seems to be dealing with representative language and its

various possibilities. After rejecting the validity of 'ressemblance', he concentrates on representative language in its psychological and creative dimensions. At the same time, he recognizes its ambiguity as a valid esthetic element, however undesirable it may be outside the theatrical situation.

On the whole, it appears valid to say that Molière is well aware of the philosophy and problems of language. This, however, does not necessarily indicate a conscious attempt or intention on his part to modify the given structure of language. It is more probable that this modification occurred as a result of changes in his total dramatic outlook, which were doubtlessly unconscious (or 'intuitive') in part, as well as partly conscious. His knowledge of the problems of language seems, however, to indicate a conscious awareness of its importance to the dramatic production as a whole.

It also seems valid to say that, during the ten-year period (1659-1669) in which his direct statements on language are made, he conforms to the epistomological concept of language as representation while rejecting that of 'ressemblance'. This corresponds to what has been stated earlier in reference to the plays produced during that same

period. At the same time, his concept of language as an infinite creative force within an infinite dialectic suggests endless possibilities of linguistic manifestation. This would reinforce the possibility of projecting language into a different philosophical sphere, that of 'signification'. What remains to be done is to outline the mechanism whereby language evolves from 'ressemblance' through 'représentation' to 'signification'.

NOTES TO CHAPTER V

[1]Molière, Oeuvres complètes, Seuil, p. 8. See also Antoine Adam, Histoire de la littérature française au XXVII[e] siècle, tome I, del Duca (Paris), 1962, pp. 160-161 for information on Molière d'Essertines. Also Francis L. Lawrence, op. cit., p. 66.

[2]Molière, Oeuvres, Pléiade, vol. 1, p. 482.

[3]Ibid., p. 543.

[4]W. G. Moore, "Molière's Theory of Comedy", in L'Esprit Créateur, VI, 3, Fall 1966, p. 137.

[5]Lettre sur la comédie de l'Imposteur, Slatkine Reprints (Geneva), 1969, pp. 26-27.

[6]It does, for example, to Hubert, op. cit., p. 108.

[7]Sellstrom, op. cit., p. 431.

[8]Moore, "Molière's Theory of Comedy", pp. 137-144.

[9]Noam Chomsky, Aspects of the Theory of Syntax. The M.I.T. Press (Cambridge), 1965, in the preface and elsewhere.

[10]Lewis, "Merleau-Ponty and the Phenomenology of Language," p. 33.

[11]"Lettre sur les observations d'une comédie du Sieur Molière intitulée Le Festin de Pierre," in Molière, Oeuvres Complètes, ed. Despois-Mesnard, p. 244.

[12]"Lettre écrite sur la comédie du Misanthrope," in Molière, Oeuvres complètes de Molière, vol. 4, Lheureux (Paris), 1823, p. 19.

[13]Molière, Oeuvres, Pléiade, vol. I, p. 649.

CHAPTER VI

THE EVOLUTION OF A CONCEPT

The preceding chapters have suggested the basic structure of Molière's evolution from 'ressemblance' through 'représentation' to 'signification'. The earliest farces are popular manifestations of 'ressemblance'; once these are abandoned, the change to 'représentation' is inevitable if Molière is to succeed as a dramatist in the age of representation. The development of 'signification' appears as a result of Molière's having exhausted the possibilities of 'représenation'.

The first change, from 'ressemblance' to 'représentation', does not seem to have been an abrupt or automatic one. In his first full-length plays, L'Etourdi and Dépit amoureux, Molière studies the relationships between language and action, and between verbal and visual signs. Then, in Les Précieuses ridicules, there is a confrontation between comic language and farce, as well as a recognition of the comic nature of certain forms of contemporary language. Although these plays do not appear as direct manifestations of 'représentation', they do suggest the means by which the change to 'représentation' was realized. This they do, it seems, in the personnage of Mascarille.

As much as Mascarille is a character of farce, he is also the forerunner of representation. He is a 'little mask', as his name suggests; he is whatever mask he dons: a cunning 'débrouillard' in L'Etourdi, a confused servant in the Dépit, and a would-be 'précieux' in Les Précieuses. There is an affinity between his name and his personnage, but it is the affinity between a mask and whoever dons it. It is a changing affinity, a changing 'ressemblance', and once the element of change enters into the system of things, that system may no longer be one of immutable resemblances or of static essences. By constantly changing his 'nature', Mascarille constantly presents himself as a different object for our scrutiny; he becojes a representation of comic characters rather than a pre-defined type. Since these three plays in which he appears are three in which Molière is experimenting with the comic genre, Mascarille must be taken as the symbol of, if not the key to, the development of a comic theatre based on 'représentation'.

Despite the differences of opinion found in Molière criticism, everyone seems to be in agreement about one fundamental point: the great diversity found in his work. This diversity is due to the element of change, the constant novelty and freshness of his plays. And this element of change is what

created comedy out of farce, 'représentation' out of 'ressemblance'. Since 'représentation' admits the validity of change, it is necessary to the constant creation of new forms of comedy.

In Sganarelle, Dom Garcie, and L'Ecole des maris, the possibilities of representative language are explored further. Then, in Les Fâcheux, representative language is isolated as the major dramatic element. Molière shows himself in control of that aspect of language after having dramatized its possibilities in previous plays.

L'Ecole des femmes utilizes representative language to represent itself; language thus becomes 'metalanguage'. This metalinguistic dimension of the theatre produces a certain ambiguity and therefore different interpretations by different spectators, and finally the Querelle. It is in defense of L'Ecole des femmes that Molière defines language as a form of dramatic action, while ninimizing the play's ambiguity. Then, in Le mariage forcé, the validity of 'ressemblance' is summarily dismissed, as though to punctuate the validity of representative language.

Once Molière has mastered representative language, he uses it to represent itself; it is almost as though, in the enthusiasm fostered by

the realization of a new esthetic concept, he seeks to carry it immediately to its ultimate possibilities. This, I believe, accounts for the success of L'Ecole des femmes; it is easy to see that, if all references to language were removed from the play, or even if the changing manifestations of language were not present, the result would be similar to L'Ecole des maris: a good comedy, but not a great one.

La Princesse d'Elide begins the cycle of 'myth' plays. Euryale falls in love with the verbal representation of the princess rather than with her physical presence. From this starting point, the play studies the interrelationship between language and myth. Tartuffe demonstrates that myth is valid only in terms of 'ressemblance'; Dom Juan re-defines myth in terms of representative language and thus colors it with ambiguity. Amphitryon points out the dependency of myth on poetry, while the play's'poet', Sosie, discerns the ambiguity of mythology. Finally, in George Dandin, mythology is annihilated with the title character.

In his treatment of myth, Molière seems to have substituted representative language for mythical language. The result is to render myth hopelessly ambiguous, even devoid of any understandable meaning. The ambiguity of myth derives from the ambiguity of representative language,

which Molière had emphasized in the preface to Tartuffe. It is Dom Juan who exploits the ambiguity of language to its fullest extent, going so far as to suggest the metamorphosis of representative into significative language.

Further possibilities of representative language are developed in the following plays; most center around its ambiguity (Le Misanthrope is the most notable exception; it is probably the most perfect of Molière's plays based on representative language.). In Mélicerte, dramatic language and dramatic time are made to coincide. This coincidence of language and time may be an attempt to solve the problem of ambiguity: if language's function as representation is continuously postponed, ambiguity is replaced by anticipation. The most obvious drawback to this device is that any play in which it is utilized must necessarily remain unfinished, as Mélicerte was.

In L'Avare, the ambiguities of representative language are avoided when Harpagon replaces language with an unambiguous object. Monsieur de Pourceaugnac demonstrates the invalidity of 'ressemblance' as a substitute for 'représentation'. Les Amants magnifiques suggests that, in spite of the weaknesses of representative lan-

guage, it is still superior to other forms of representation, particularly on the esthetic level. Le Bourgeois gentilhomme resolves the ambiguity of representative language by re-originating language and creating a system of verbal symbiosis in which the way to M. Jourdain's pocketbook is through his semantic structure. The invalidity of the symbiotic situation is its inability to continue in time, as La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas shows.

Finally, in Les Fourberies de Scapin, the invalidity of representative language is dramatized, to be replaced by 'signification' in Les Femmes savantes and Le Malade imaginaire.

The structure of the evolution of language from 'ressemblance' to 'signification' should now be apparent. Language is 'ressemblance' in the farce, in that it is one of many signs whose purpose is to communicate. What will happen in later plays, as Foucault would say, is that "les choses et les mots vont se séparer." Language is made distinct from the other dramatic elements; as such, it becomes a form of 'représentation' rather than a clear and intelligible sign. At the moment at which its 'représentativité' is recognized, its weakness, that of ambiguity, becomes apparent. This ambiguity, originally used for comic effect,

takes on philosophical dimensions with Tartuffe. And it is this developing ambiguity which leads to the gratuitousness of language and then to its invalidity as 'représentation'. The simple ambiguity of word and object becomes that of language and content in general. It is ambiguity that makes 'représentation' impossible and 'signification' inevitable: language must mean something other than what it is supposed to represent. By realizing and dramatizing this, Molière has projected his theatre through time and assured its pertinence well beyond the neo-classical age.

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